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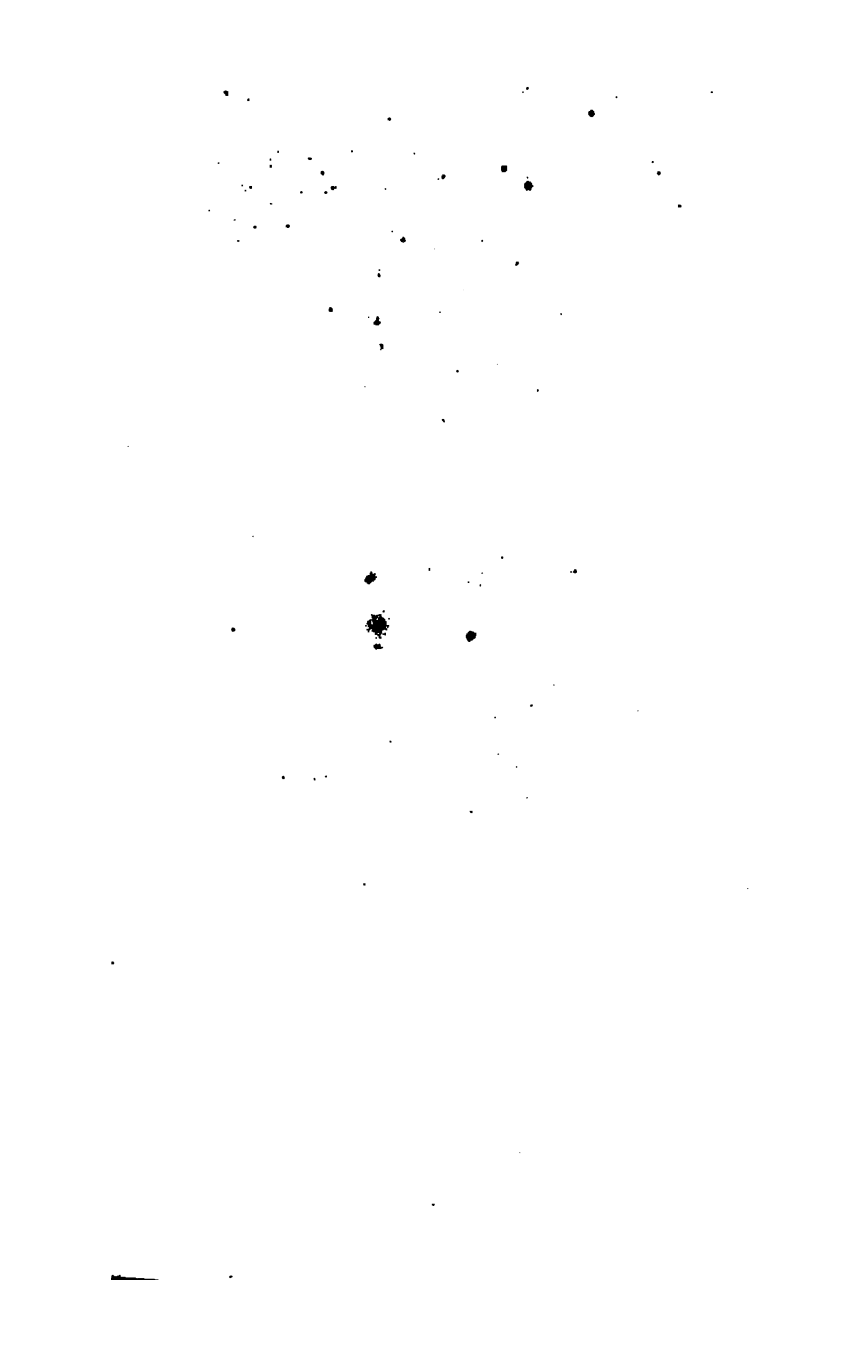
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SABBATH MORNING
READINGS

ON THE

OLD TESTAMENT.

BY

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COVENT GARDEN.

The First and Second Books of Samuel.

“ So they read in the Book distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them
to understand the reading.”—NEHEM. viii. 8.

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SABBATH MORNING READINGS

ON THE

First Book of Samuel.

BIRTH OF SAMUEL.*

CHAPTER I.

NAME OF THIS BOOK. SUBJECTS. ELKANAH. POLYGAMY. HANNAH MISINTERPRETED. ELI'S APOLOGY. BIRTH OF SAMUEL. DEDICATION OF SAMUEL.

THIS First Book of Samuel in the Hebrew original forms one continuous book with the second. It has been called in the Latin Vulgate the First Book of Kings; Second Samuel is called the Second Book of Kings; our First and Second Kings being called the Third and Fourth Book of Kings. The name adopted in our version—I think the just and proper one—is the First Book of Samuel. We have set before us in this book in the most striking manner the carelessness of Eli; the contrasting though youthful piety of Samuel; the budding glories of David, the King of Israel; the depravity of Saul; together with chapters of inspired history the most intensely interesting and instructive, without which there would be a blank in

* *The Book of Ruth will be published in one volume complete.*

the annals of the past that no records that we possess can supply.

In this chapter we have the description of Elkanah, a Levite and an Ephrathite. In those days polygamy was not sanctioned, but tolerated by God. There are things in the world which God tolerates, but does not approve, for in his own word he has expressly condemned them. The origin of marriage was the union of one man and one woman, and "they twain shall be one flesh;" the abuse of it crept in during the antediluvian and patriarchal days. But wherever the abuse is spoken of, it is always with such circumstances as set forth at once not only its inconvenience, but the disastrous results to which it invariably leads. It is one of the most striking features in the record of this departure from the original institution, that wherever it prevailed its practical and disastrous results are constantly related. We have these set forth in this very chapter. Elkanah had married two wives,—publicly married them,—for they were recognised as his wives. The short story contained in this chapter is evidence of the inconvenience of the practice, its evil results and effects, and the unhappiness of that home in which any departure from what is God's law has in the least degree been tolerated. Every mother in Israel had a hope of being the mother of the Messiah: the very song of Hannah in the succeeding chapter contains almost the first notes of the thanksgiving song of the Virgin Mary. Hannah grieved that she was not a mother, because she hoped that she might be the mother of Him, according to the flesh, who was to be the light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his *people Israel*. She went to Him from whom cometh

down every good and perfect gift; and in the spirit of true prayer, but in great bitterness of heart, and apparently with little hope that her prayer would be heard, drew near in the public sanctuary, and thus addressed God:—"O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him"—that is, dedicate, devote him—"unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head"—he shall come under the Nazarite's vow, and be consecrated unto the Lord.

While she prayed there was presented an evidence how good men may err; how inexpedient it is to judge from first impressions; and how unbecoming it was in an aged priest, whose experience ought to have taught him better, to infer drunkenness where there was really sorrow of heart and fervent prayer to Almighty God. But so it is—the best may err; and it only teaches us in such circumstances where misconception, misapprehension, and mistake are so probable, to think twice before we venture publicly to pronounce once. When he saw her attitude, and her lips moving, though he heard no voice, he thought she had been drinking—that she was intoxicated, and therefore he instantly addressed her in language harsh and repulsive:—"How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee." He evidently lost his temper as well as his ordinary discretion, and spoke to her not only unadvisedly, but in an angry and irritable manner. She answered, however, not in the same spirit in which he spoke. Herein she presented a beautiful precedent for us, and *gave evidence that a soft answer turneth away*

wrath. Instead of saying that he had no right to insult her—that it did not become the high priest to pronounce judgment where there was no real evidence, she replies, in a meek and gentle spirit,—“No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.” Eli, if wrong in his first rash judgment, had the good sense, the good taste, and feeling to retract, and therefore he said, “Go in peace,” as much as to say, “I see I was mistaken; I am sorry for it; and the God of Israel grant thee—not a drunkard, but a sorrowful petitioner—thy petition which thou hast asked of him.” When one has committed an error, the only remedy is to apologise for it; and when that is done, it becomes the evidence of a right spirit, though it may be of an infirm temper.

The consequence was “she went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.” And God was pleased to grant her petition. There was born unto her a son, on whose history, and remarkable, beautiful, and growing character, we shall enter in the course of our reading of this interesting book.

She goes the very next year, and appears before Eli again, and says nothing angry, but reminds him that she was the sorrowful petitioner whom he rashly rebuked; that she had now obtained from the Lord the blessing she had asked, and that she had come to dedicate to his glory the gift that she had obtained from his great mercy, on which we will discourse at *greater length* in the next chapter.

LENT TO THE LORD.

“And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there.”—1 SAMUEL i. 26—28.

WE have read the simple record of the first interview of Hannah with Eli, the priest of Israel; we have heard the severe and unmerited rebuke administered to her; we have seen how mildly and in what a Christian spirit the woman replied to the priest, showing thereby that she lived nearer to God than even he; and we have, lastly, the priest evidently undeceived, sorry for his rash expressions, and apologising for them. At the close of the chapter Hannah appears in the temple of the Lord, not to rebuke or to taunt Eli, but to give thanks unto God—to own the great blessing that she had received, and to let Eli join with her in praising Him who had looked down in mercy upon his handmaid. On the same floor on which she knelt a year before a sorrowful petitioner, she now stands a joyous and a thankful possessor. The blessing which she had got in answer to a prayer, she feels it not her duty only—for that is a low idea—but her privilege, to *go again into God's courts*, and to express in joyous

thanksgiving. Her tears are dried, her mourning is turned into gladness, and she is not ashamed to thank Him in public to whom she appealed in public, for his blessing vouchsafed to her. Here is the efficacy of prayer. What we want, it is our privilege to tell God, and ask him to give it, whatever it be. In her case we have a striking instance of this. It is all very well, answers some one, to say, "Ask of God what you want;" but how do you know that what you want is good for you, or consistent for God to give? These are metaphysical questions we have nothing to do with; our privilege is to pray; our duty and privilege is to ask of God that very thing, unless it be in itself intrinsically sinful, which we most earnestly want, and to ask it of him absolutely in the name and through the mediation of Christ Jesus. He will settle, in his infinite wisdom, whether it be best to give it, or its equivalent—when, and how, and under what circumstances to give it; but the thing you ask, or its equivalent, God will give; and if twenty silver shillings be as good as one golden sovereign, then if the blessing which we have asked in one shape, God is pleased to give in another, it is equally the bestowal of the blessing. We have an instance in Hannah of a blessing asked of a temporal kind, absolutely asked, and liberally given. We have an instance in Paul of a spiritual blessing asked, and the thing he asked, not given, but what was just as good, an equivalent for it. "I prayed the Lord thrice that this thorn, this trial, might depart from me." God heard his prayer; he did not give Paul precisely what he asked, but he gave him what was just as good; he said, "*My grace is sufficient for you; my strength shall be made per-*

fect in weakness." If God does not take the load off my shoulder, as I ask, but, instead, gives me double strength to bear the load, it is the same thing, and the blessing is equally given, only in God's way, not according to man's preference. Hannah not only asked this blessing of God, but she looked for an answer. One of the best tests of real prayer is that we patiently wait for an answer. But is it not too true that many pray, and, five minutes after they have prayed, forget what they prayed for? And if God in great kindness answers the prayer, they do not recollect that this is the blessing that days, months, years ago, they earnestly and anxiously prayed for. Whatever one earnestly seeks, one will constantly look for. The archer watches if the arrow hit the mark; the petitioner will watch if the prayer shall issue in praise; and he that asks, but never looks in the future for what he has asked, was either a very careless, or a very cold petitioner, or a hypocrite altogether. Where there is true prayer, there will be waiting for an answer—not anxious, but quiet waiting. True prayer will end in praise. As sure as the healthy plant develops itself in blossom, earnest, heartfelt prayer will issue and effloresce in praise. We never asked earnestly, in the right spirit and in the right name, without obtaining effectually; and none ever bowed the knee in earnest prayer for a blessing, who had not afterwards, if he was a Christian and prayed truly, to stand and give praise and thanksgiving to Him from whom all good gifts continually proceed. There is no load upon the heaviest heart that is not lightened by kneeling under it in prayer—there is no sorrow that is not sweetened by mentioning it to God—there is no bless-

ing we possess that is not enhanced by thanking God for it—no cup when it runneth over that is not sweetened by telling God, “Thine it is, and from thee it came, and to thee we give the praise, the honour, and the thanks.”

Here, too, is Hannah’s resolution respecting Samuel. She promised that if she should obtain this son, she would lend him to the Lord; she would not be satisfied with thanking God with her lips. Does not this remind us also of duties? Have we been prospered in this world beyond our expectation, infinitely beyond our desert? What have we done? Have we not some of us, not even thanked God, but our own good fortune; or, secondly, have we thanked him with our lips, but no more; or, thirdly, have we devoted something of what he has given us as a free will and acceptable offering to him? If we have not, we, amid the lights of the evangelical economy, are far behind Hannah amid the dimmer lights of an economy that has passed away. Hannah lent Samuel to the Lord—dedicated or consecrated him. Let us study first Hannah, lending Samuel the child to the Lord as a precedent; secondly, his dedication to the Lord as a minister; and, thirdly, his dedication as a type of Christians in general. Samuel, the child, was dedicated to the Lord by his mother. It is the duty of parents to dedicate and devote their children to God, not simply by praying for them, but by teaching, instructing, and influencing them in the ways of righteousness, which are ways of pleasantness and peace. In the case of children, we have the opportunity of making the easiest, the deepest, and the *most lasting impressions*. If it be true that in child-

hood impressions are most easily made, and, when made, are deepest and most lasting, what an encouragement to every parent and Sunday-school teacher to try to create those impressions, that by grace will live and culminate in glory in the world to come! The lessons we learn when children, are more easily recollected than those we learned at twenty and thirty years of age. Old men who forget most of what occurs to them at forty, fifty, or sixty, recollect vividly the first lesson they learned in the nursery, or the first smile of a mother. Impressions made in childhood are deepest, and most lasting also; in childhood the passions are all infant passions. I am not asserting that children are born angels. No mother will ever come to that conclusion; the temper of the fallen soon contradicts that theory; but, in the infant, those passions that become like lions, and tigers, and beasts of prey in the adult, are yet nestling in their own recesses, like the infants, themselves feeble, and the resistance which they offer therefore to the introduction of truth is proportionably less. Then there is the least obstruction from passion—little prejudice to darken the mind—no inveterate feeling yet to harden it; the feet of traffic have not trodden the ground hard, so that the seed scattered rebound from it; it is now so important to insinuate principles, truths, and lessons which will last and live. If you take care of the young, you need not be so solicitous about the old; if you mind the school and the nursery, you may calculate on the church and the chapel. If we would only spend more in teaching the young early, living religion, we should spend much less in trying to enlighten and convert the old.

The most useful characters whose names are recorded in the sacred page had the blessing and benefit of early tuition—Joseph, Samuel, David, Abijah, Jonah, Daniel, John the Baptist, and Timothy. Timothy had for teachers his mother and grandmother; and his own character is an evidence of the success of such teaching. The worst characters that have passed through our world, like comets or like meteors, distributing and letting fall impressions of terror, and dismay, and evil, have in most instances received their worst impressions in their earliest days. In fact, the first ten or fourteen years of life very much decide the future character: the outlines are then graven, and all subsequent life is only the filling up of those outlines. If such be the case, what responsibility on parentage—on teachers—on a congregation that is placed in the midst of those who are not able to reach the saving and sanctifying knowledge of the Gospel of Christ Jesus! Eternity is wrapped up in that little infant; the child is the father to the man; the crisis of character is in childhood. In that pretty prattling child there may be wrapped up a Martin Luther or a Voltaire, a Paine or a Calvin, a Latimer, a Ridley, very much, under God, dependant on the tone of your character, on the assiduity, and faithfulness, and affectionateness, and influence of your Christian instruction. But while this is the right course and the dutiful one, thus early to lend, dedicate, devote, or consecrate our children to the Lord, is it not too true that other gods seem to be introduced into the nursery as well as into the Christian temple? Are there not some parents that seem from the earliest moments to lend *their children* only to Mammon? What is educa-

tion? It is not the reading of the lesson in the nursery, but it is the whole tone and atmosphere of character with which the child comes into contact. The true education is not the alphabet or the lesson book, but the living atmosphere around us. There are some parents that really lend and devote their children to Mammon. Is it not the thought they often discuss, How much will this gain? how much will that lose? what will be the profit of this, and what will be the profit of that? how much will this dress cost? how much will that amusement be?—money-making being apparently, if a stranger might judge, the staple of all conversation, and the great governing and dominant thought in the home. If our whole thought and conversation are to be about what is called getting on in the world—a very proper thing in its place; about being successful in business—very proper and very right in its place, and very right to seek to be so;—what must be the effect? That the atmosphere the child breathes is that of the market and the exchange, and you are habituating that child to think that to make a rich marriage, to get a great fortune, to be successful in business, and retire, are the chief end of man, instead of being, what they should be, taught, in life as well as words, to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever. Would you not think it a very cruel thing to take a red-hot sovereign, if such a thing could be, and brand its mark upon the forehead of your child? And yet that is not so great cruelty as the branding of Mammon upon the infant mind and heart. Let us not lead a child to think that money is the chief thing, and money-making is the whole duty of man. *I do not say these things are worthless; a*

fanatic only would say so: they have in their proper place their weight and value, but the dominant and controlling influence ought to be something higher, holier, and more lasting. Do not others seem to lend their children not to Mammon, but to what is called the world? In other words, the child is taught that its first thought is to be how it shall shine, how it shall gather around itself the admiration and *éclat* of others; accomplishments are the great things, moral duties and quiet retirement the last things thought of. To be a butterfly in the summer sunshine is the ambition of many a child, not in the lower classes only, for they are not so unfortunate, but among the highest. Can anything be more destructive or more injurious to moral character? Does not all experience attest that such lending or consecration is what a prince found it of old—vanity and vexation of spirit? Others, taking a higher view, lend their children to science, to literature, to intellect; and certainly these are very noble ends, and in their place most dutiful and important. But we must never teach a child that to be a philosopher is the end of life, or that to be a first-rate geologist, or astronomer, or botanist, is the main thing. These things are most important, the study of them most dutiful; to banish them is wrong, to teach them is almost duty, certainly it is delight. The child must be taught, however, that it is possible to be a great scholar, a great philosopher, and yet not to be a Christian; it is possible to have a cultivated intellect, but a debased and stunted heart; and to be acquainted with all the wisdom of this world, but never to have learned the way, the truth, and the *life*. *Hannah* gave her child Samuel neither to the

world, nor to Mammon, nor to philosophy and science, but "she lent him to the Lord."

Let us look at Samuel lent to the Lord as a minister, a prophet, a teacher of the people; and we shall see the excellence of that character and office, as illustrated in his life. No function is more important, no office more useful, than that of a truly faithful and devoted minister of Christ Jesus. Samuel was brought to the knowledge of the Lord as a child; and he grew up to be a teacher and prophet amidst the people. What should be the character of a minister? One lent to the Lord; one wholly devoted to sacred, solemn, and eternal things. What are some of the elements of such consecration? His whole heart is wholly in his work. The first thing required is confidence in the divinity of his mission. If a minister think the ministry is instituted merely for a piece of bread, or as a mere appendage to society, or a decent custom, or an honourable profession, he had better abdicate the office at once. It is an embassy from heaven, a mission from God's throne; a great effort that God has instituted to awaken the world, and sanctify the church, and bring souls to happiness and heaven. If we be lent to the Lord, and truly dedicated to him, we shall have confidence in the grandeur and responsibility of that office, as it speaks to and deals with immortal souls. If one only feels that the great object of a ministry is not to amuse, nor charm, nor teach merely; but to seek the lost, to save the ruined, it is impossible that one who feels these topics in all their grandeur and weight, can ever speak lifelessly or uselessly, or evince that he is otherwise than lent and devoted wholly to the Lord. One lent and devoted to the

Lord must give all he is, and all he can command, to the great work and mission to which he professes to be consecrated and lent. This is the first, chief function of a minister—"Give thyself wholly to it; preach not Christianity, but Christ crucified; not a doctrine, but a living Saviour; and only a ministry consecrated by God, and devoted to God, will be owned and blessed of God, to the conviction of men's minds, and to the conversion of men's hearts.

Let us look at Samuel as in his measure the type of a Christian. We have the idea that a priest of Levi was properly anointed, and a minister of the gospel is properly ordained; but we forget that every true Christian is just as much consecrated to God as the highest prelate or the humblest presbyter. What is the meaning of the name? The name Christian means a person anointed; on whom the holy oil has been poured; and if we be Christians at all, we are consecrated or lent to God. And what is the description of our condition? "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price, even the precious blood of a Lamb without spot and without blemish." If we be Christians at all, we are consecrated persons; we are what is called in the Bible, saints; that is, holy persons, set apart to a specific work, and consecrated by a special unction. We are prone to entertain the presence of the Romish element, which transfers all thought of responsibility from ourselves to the priest, or prelate, or minister; and to think that while it becomes a minister like Paul, an evangelist like Luke, a prophet like Samuel, to be consecrated, that it is not to be expected of plain people, and people *in business*, that they should be lent and consecrated

wholly to the Lord. But it is as much expected in the Bible, that lawyers, physicians, tradesmen, and merchants, should be equally consecrated and lent to the Lord. You may be husbands, or wives, or sons, or daughters, or fathers, or mothers,—these are subordinate relationships; but in all and over all you have a relationship to God—you are consecrated and lent to him. And if you be so, then what will be your state? That you are born again, that you are transformed by the renewing of your minds; that you are bent on doing something to serve, honour, and glorify him. Let any one who comes to the Lord's table take a retrospect of his past life, and say, How much have I done for God? What have I given; what suffered, what sacrificed, what attempted to glorify God, and to make known his ways upon the earth, and his saving health among all nations? How much have you given for luxuries, for personal gratification? what have you laid out in the shape of amusement, in its place legitimate enough; and when you have taken this estimate of the past, ask, What have I done for that cause, and towards the promotion of that great object for which God bowed the heavens, and suffered on a cross; and ever liveth to plead for us at the Father's right hand? Without judging uncharitably, many must be constrained to say, "We have left undone what we ought to have done;" and I trust and pray they may be led to add, "But we will do so no more." If then, as Christians, we are lent to the Lord, we shall be steadfast, earnest, persistent fellow-labourers with Christ; either reaping the white harvests of the fields that wait for us, or sowing beside all waters the seeds of *eternal truth*. *Learn what is truly a scrip-*

tural thought, that in the Bible the minister and the missionary are not the only agents sent out to act upon the world ; but that every Christian is, from the fact of his Christianity, a missionary ; that missionary action is his function and office ; and that in his sphere and place he is to try to sow the seeds of truth, and make the world better for his having been in it ; and raise up, by God's blessing, around him many that at that day will acknowledge, " We were ignorant, and you enlightened us ; we were naked, and you clothed us ; we were without God and without Christ, and you taught us the way that leads to heaven, the way of happiness and of peace." If we had a thoroughly deep and earnest sense of this dedication to God,—if we really felt it to be a reality, and not a mere theological idea,—our zeal would burn, and yet not border on fanaticism ; our love would exhibit itself in a thousand shapes, a love that would not compromise the truth ; and in various ways and through various instrumentalities we should diffuse that blessed gospel which makes men happy here, and fits them for being happy hereafter.

Christians are lent to God ; either their parents lent them in baptism, or when they taught them in childhood ; or they themselves at a communion-table have come forward, and said, " Here, and in the presence of these sacred symbols, that remind us of what a Saviour suffered and what our salvation cost—here, O Lord, we lend ourselves to thee ; we devote our intellects, our hearts, our consciences, our influence—all that we are we devote to thee ; we desire to be the lights of the world ; we are determined to go forth the salt of *the earth*—a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a

holy nation, a peculiar people,—to show forth the praises of him who hath called us from darkness into his marvellous light." Lent in the nursery, lent in the pew, lent in the pulpit, and lent wholly to the Lord. Is it so with us?

If we be thus lent to God, and thus his people, if we be indeed what our name Christian proclaims, we shall not repine or murmur when God visits us with loss, affliction, and distress. Does he call us to arduous duties? does he summon us to sore tribulation? does he say to all the wealth that we have, "Put out wings, and flee away, and leave that man poor that you have once made so rich, and, alas! so proud and ungrateful?" What must be our feeling? The suffering no one can doubt; the loss we must feel, because we are not stoics, but human beings; but if we be lent to the Lord, we shall recollect we are not our own, we have given ourselves to him, and he has only taken what is his own; we shall have an inner consolation more than a compensation for outward trial; for by a happy alchemy the Christian extracts from the bitter wormwood of sore tribulation a sweetness and a joy that the world is altogether a stranger to. It may be his will to take away those who are nearly and dearly related to us. Many men say there is no sin, but I never yet found a man who said there is no sorrow; he must too often drink its cup to the dregs. None can deny that we are born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward. When God takes away some one near and dear to you, what must be your feeling? what should be your language? "Well! I lent and dedicated myself to the Lord; all I have I *gave to him, and laid* upon his altar as justly

his ; and therefore the Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord." If we have this feeling, graves that no time can close will be covered with a celestial glory, and memories that life will not efface will be radiant and sweetened by blessed recollections ; and we shall feel, what is the most joyous of all, that what we lend to God he does not take for his own pleasure,—he returns them to us beautified and glorified, and yet more precious than before. Have we, then, lent ourselves to God at a communion-table, in the privacy of our closets, in the depths of our hearts ? Have we said, " O Lord, I am thy handmaid ! O Lord, I am thine ?" Then what a different aspect will this world wear ! All this property that I have accumulated, by God's blessing on my industry, is not mine ; all these relations, children, parents, brothers, sisters, are not mine ; all that we are and have is not ours :—it belongs to God, he is the great Proprietor. When he takes, he takes his own ; I shall feel, but I cannot murmur ; and, looking round upon this world, I shall see that all is under the control, subject to the influence, and arranged by the wisdom of a Father who pities and loves us, and knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust ; and is arranging all and doing all, not, as we sometimes think, in obedience to chance and random laws, but in infinite wisdom, in boundless mercy, for his highest glory and for our chiefest good.

HANNAH'S SONG.

CHAPTER II.

THANKSGIVING. ITS GRANDEUR. SUPERIORITY TO HEATHEN POETRY.
INSPIRATION. ELI'S SONS. JUDGMENTS ON HIS HOUSE.

SAMUEL, the promised son, was born to Hannah in answer to her own earnest petition; and she, in acknowledgment of the goodness of Him who had given her so precious a gift, lent or consecrated him, before the age when a Levite could legitimately officiate, to the service of the Lord God of Israel. She begins with expressing her thanksgiving in song; and in the sequel of the chapter, where we read of the dedication of Samuel, she expresses it by the fulfilment of her vow. Hannah, therefore, prayed, and said, "My heart rejoiceth," not in Samuel the gift, but "in the Lord," the giver of the gift. There is a difference: a worldly man, specially prospered, rejoices in his prosperity; a Christian man looks through the prosperity to the source from which it comes, and gives the praise where it is due; and thus the giver is thanked, and the blessing is lawfully and dutifully used. She says, "Mine horn is exalted." The horn is the symbol of strength, the ornament of an animal; it was figuratively used, therefore, to express the position and the dignity of an individual—"Mine horn is

exalted in the Lord;" and she adds, "I rejoice in thy salvation." She proclaims God's holiness—"There is none holy as the Lord." She asserts next his exclusive sovereignty and dominion—"there is none beside thee." She then states that he is the great foundation, the refuge, the shelter, the shadow and defence of his people—"neither is there any rock like our God." She calls upon people to talk not so proudly—to let no arrogant expression come forth from their mouth, for they should never forget that God is omniscient, because "by him actions are weighed," and he is a "God of knowledge." She speaks to the warrior, and says, "Let not them be proud; for the bows of the mighty men are broken, and the feeble that once stumbled are girded with strength." In the sixth verse she tells us of God's providential sovereignty: he kills, he maketh alive, he bringeth down to the grave, he bringeth up. There is, therefore, no chance, or accident, and no power that can successfully resist his; no opposition that can interfere with the execution of his wise and beneficent sovereignty among the sons of men. "He raiseth the poor out of the dust." Elevation or success in life are blessings that he bestows. "The pillars of the earth are the Lord's;" he made the world, he arranged it, and he governs it. And "he will keep the feet of his saints;" he keeps them from falling, their "eyes from tears, their souls from death." "His adversaries shall be broken to pieces; and he will give strength to his king." Now, you might extract from this beautiful song, so like two of the songs of the New Testament scripture, almost all the leading truths of the *Bible*—certainly the great characteristic attributes of

the living and the true God. If you will only recollect that this song was sung at least eleven hundred years before the birth of our blessed Lord; and if, at the same time, you will collect the songs of the most gifted of mankind, either contemporaneous, or, if possible, preceding, or any of the very choicest of succeeding ages,—you will see in them all such wretched theology, such miserable apprehensions of Deity, such drivelling and puerile notions of his attributes and his power, notwithstanding much poetry and refinement, that you will be constrained to ask, How is it that this Hebrew maiden has expressed a grander theology in this simple song than Homer in his “Iliad,” or Hesiod in his “Days and Nights,” indeed, than any of the greatest and the most gifted philosophers, poets, or orators of cultivated and æsthetic Greece? There is no explanation of it except one: Homer sung as his own great genius taught him; Hannah praised as God Almighty from heaven inspired her. We have, therefore, an evidence of inspiration here that is unmis-takeable, and a proof that the secret of the elevation of the Jew was that God was a God near to him.

After this fine trait in the character of Hannah, we read of the conduct of the sons of Eli. They intruded into the priest's office; showed the most avaricious, the most mercenary, irreligious, and unholy conduct in all respects, in connection with the temple, in relation to the market, in reference to the priests, and with regard to the inhabitants of the country. Nothing could be more abandoned than their conduct—nothing more disgraceful to the name of the venerable priest that presided in Israel. The great fault of Eli was *that he seems to have remained unconscious of*

what was going on, or indifferent to what they were doing ; not apparently caring that the very name of God was blasphemed, that the offerings in the temple were regarded by the people as vile, that the infidel scoffed, and that the heathen triumphed at the degradation of the temple, the priesthood, and the people of Israel. God interposed, and showed to Eli what he was doing, what his sin was, and what the consequences of that sin would be. God tells him in one word, what is so true still, "Be it far from me ; for them that honour me I will honour." This is not a maxim Levitical or Jewish, but moral, spiritual, and eternal. He that honours God, careless of his own comfort, contemptuous of his own grandeur, and thinks only of doing service to Him, shall be honoured of Him ; he that despises God shall be lightly esteemed. God then predicts the judgments that should come upon his house, showing that though Eli was a true Christian, yet as the sins perpetrated by his sons were flagrant, and done in the sight of all Israel, the retribution should be equally conspicuous ; so that men might learn not only from God's Word, but from descending showers of retribution, even on the household of his high priest, that it is no abstract dogma, but a living, practical truth—"Them that honour me, I will honour ; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

APOCALYPSE OF GOD TO SAMUEL.

CHAPTER III.

JUDGMENT ON ELI. ELI'S SUBMISSION.

appears that during the strange demoralisation which had taken place in the land of Israel, both among the priesthood and among the people, that in those days, as it is stated in the opening verse, there was no open vision; "that is to say, God had ceased to communicate from heaven his messages to the people: they had only the recollection of the past—probably distorted traditions—distorted by their own ignorance, perversity of conduct; and there was no open communication of God with those who had acted as if they were acting in a manner so unworthy of Christian consistent character. "It came to pass at that time, when Eli was resting in his chamber, and his eyes began to wax dim,"—alike with the heaviness of old age, and the deepening mists of old age,—“that he could not see; and ere the lamp of God went out from the temple of the Lord, where the ark of the Lord was,” where God spake and gave messages,—the ark being the symbol of Christ's presence in the midst of his church; “and also whilst Samuel was lying down to sleep,” that God restored his suspended communication with his people, and called Samuel;

and Samuel answered, "Here am I." Samuel, thinking that it was the aged high priest that had called him, ran to Eli, and said, "Here am I; for thou calledst me;" Eli said he had not called him; and he went and laid down again. The Lord then called again; and Samuel, still thinking it was the voice of Eli, ran to the aged priest, and protested strenuously that Eli had called him. "Now," it is added in the seventh verse, "Samuel did not yet know the Lord." That does not mean that he was not a Christian, because we have the evidence in previous chapters that he was; but that he did not know that God then revealed himself by direct and personal utterances to his people: not being acquainted with this mode of revelation—it having been suspended so long because of the sins of the people—Samuel could not believe that it was a divine voice; and therefore supposed, erroneously as he discovered, that it was merely the call of the aged priest and father, Eli. Again we read God called Samuel, and again he went to Eli. Eli saw this could be no dream, or fancy in the imagination of the child; and inferred that therefore it must be the divine voice restored and resounding again in the midst of Israel. He forthwith instructed the child what he should do and say; namely, to reply when he heard the voice again, "Speak, Lord," tell me thy will; "for thy servant," ready to execute that will, now "heareth." "And Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the Lord spoke again to him, and said, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle; namely, I will execute all the judgments I have *denounced* upon the house of Eli. I will not take

his name out of the book of life—I will not give his interest in everlasting things; but I will lay upon his house, for its grievous offences, for its scandal, for its extreme wickedness, such judgments, that all Israel shall know that judgment is now at the house of God; and shall begin to ponder

shall be the end of them that believe not the word.” It may be asked, Why did God thus speak to Samuel; or why not tell him at once who he was?

It was no doubt in order to call special attention to his solemn message; it was not for Samuel's only, but for Eli's; that Eli might see and know that God had at length spoken; and that what he had said when he was able and sure to bring to pass.

After Samuel had heard this painful message, he was led to tell the aged and the venerable priest of the awful burden of prophecy with which he was burdened; but Eli, knowing that God had spoken to him, and his conscience leading him to infer that what God had spoken was justice and judgment, which he had justly provoked, insisted that Samuel should tell him all that God had said to him. Samuel told him every word; and the old man, conscious of his guilt, presenting no apology, but indicating the submission of a Christian and the penitence of one who is sorrowful, and felt, and deplored, the errors and the sins of the past, while he wished that they might be reformed, said, “It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth good.”

When Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him; and appeared to him in Shiloh; and made him the recipient of fresh revelations for the guidance, the instruction, and the comfort of his people.

IT IS THE LORD.

CHAPTER III.

“And Eli said, It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good.”—
1 SAMUEL iii. 18.

THERE is here the recognition—the unshrinking recognition—of the existence of God. This great fact—a God—is the basis of all creation, the keynote of the harmony of things, the central truth around which all others must revolve, without which creation is chaos, and man’s hopes are blasted as soon as they are formed. Let go this truth—a God; this fact—God rules,—not only *is*, but *rules*,—and you lift the anchors of your faith and hope, and man is on an unsounded and a shoreless sea, without a chart, a compass, a guide, an object, or an end. Eli recognises him as the God of providence; in other words, that God is as much required to carry on the world as God was required to create the world. The common belief is that God constructed the earth like a steamer, then set it afloat to make the best of its way home; or that God wound up things like a watch, and then left them to go on till the spring is exhausted, and the wheels stand still. But these are not just analogies. God made the earth at first *and God rules and governs the earth now*. This great

truth—God is, and God governs the world—explains all the phenomena which startle on the one hand, and all the mysterious events, dispensations, and emergencies that perplex on the other. Eli not only recognised the Lord as existing and governing, but in connection with special sin as a holy God. Shut the Bible, and the holiness of God is difficult of discovery. We may see gleams of it in his retributions, but we cannot see all its glory except in his own divinely illuminated page. But Eli had more than creation or providence—more even than conscience; he knew the Lord, he had heard the proclamation of his law, and felt, and saw, and believed that he was a just and a holy God. What is the idea of God that sin in the conscience calls up? 'A holy and a sin-avenging God. When the disciples were tossed upon the tempestuous wave, and a Deliverer drew near, making the waves his pathway, and the winds his obedient messengers, they called out, "It is a spirit!" and were afraid. Why? Because sin in the conscience made cowards of them. And when Eli here exclaimed, "It is the Lord!" the attribute that especially passed before his mind was that of a holy God. He remembered all the sins he had done—all the omissions that clave to his history—the connivance where there ought to have been rebuke—the convenient compromise where there ought to have been faithful denunciation of sin; and he saw now retribution coming up at the heels of sin, and the cup of sorrow his portion, and judgment about to begin at the house of God, its action there the awful prophecy of its tremendous retributions upon them that believe not the gospel, and obey not God's Son. *We see this holiness of God in events*

which the world cannot explain without it; in the salt sea surging over buried Sodom and Gomorrah; in Babylon, a pile of bricks; in queenly Tyre, a rock for fishermen to bleach their nets on; in Alexander the Great, smitten down in the midst of his victories and his sins; in Cæsar gathering his mantle round him, and falling beneath the daggers of his friends and foes together at the foot of Pompey's pillar; in the pestilence, with outspread wing, careering through the earth, and Death opening graves wherever it has breathed or left its footprints; in the earthquake, that gulps down a whole city, and the ocean, that buries proud navies: in all these the world hears the echoes of accidental misfortunes; the Christian beholds the glory of a holy God executing righteousness and judgment over all the earth. It is the Lord, and he is doing what to him seems good. But there are cases where we may show God acting. God takes the very sins that he hates and punishes, as in the case of Eli, and out of those sins evolves for the sin-doer increase of holiness, progress, and peace, and to his own name honour and glory. The sin is ours; its guilt it is impossible to exaggerate. We do not say it is not sin because it is overruled; yet the sins that God hates he makes a ministry of good to them he has chosen. I appeal to your innermost experience. In your past biography, is some recollected sin you once committed painful, humbling, grievous in the sight of God; but, by his interposing mercy and sovereign goodness, it has been overruled to your humbling, greater watchfulness, and tenderness of heart and conscience, until you have seen the sin, in all its shadow, and *exclaimed, in the sense of conscious guilt, "It is I!"*

while you have been constrained to add, as you beheld the glory to which it was overruled, "It is the Lord!" Retrace all the way God has led you, and see if it be possible to explain your biography without God. Who touched your conscience in your sinful career as with some mysterious electric spark? who wounded your heart so deeply that no earthly balm could heal it? who revealed in the midst of your estrangement a single text that burst upon the memory like the lightning flash from the bosom of the black cloud? who breathed into your heart words that have awakened echoes that shall never die? who pardoned your sins, and gave you peace, whilst at the same time sin plunged you in affliction that has been sanctified to your good? Who prepared three thousand at Pentecost for Christianity? who changed the persecuting Saul into the preacher Paul? who awakened in the jailer's heart that night, without warning, the irrepressible inquiry, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" With Eli, we must all own, "It is the Lord." "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not: I will lead them in paths they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight."

How precious is the conviction of Eli as you look forward into that future into which you may soon plunge! The past is gone—we cannot recall it; the present is with us—we pray that it may be sanctified to us; the future is before us. How often in the past have we said, "We will make the future this, or we will take the future, and out of it we will evolve that;" but as the future came into the present we have found a power *controlling all our plans*, rough hew them as

we would, till we were constrained to feel, even when reluctant to acknowledge it, "It is the Lord?" How often have men started on the journey of life, and said they would be, what the idle writer has often called them, the architects of their own fortune, and they have learned that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps, and that the highest practical philosophy, as well as truest divinity, is in the words we often read, often forget, never fully feel—"Take no thought for to-morrow; for the morrow will take thought for the things of itself. Behold the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, will he not much more take care of you, O ye of little faith?" In all the past God's eye has been upon us; at every step into the future a controlling power has been over us—so much so, that there is probably not an individual who is not constrained to own that he is now where he never purposed to be, and that if his own schemes, plans, and struggles, had been carried out to the utmost, he would now be in a position social, relative, spiritual, moral, the very reverse of that in which he now finds himself. That man must indeed be blind who has not seen the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, in his pilgrimage; that man's ear must indeed be deaf who does not own that he heard God continually, saying, "This is the way; walk ye in it." The redeemed in heaven, as they take a retrospect of the past, say, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just *and true are all thy ways, thou King of saints.*" This

th is precious to us when placed in the depths of at tribulation. Are you bowed down beneath a shing calamity? is your way, in the language of ipture, hedged with thorns? do all God's billows eep over you? have all your refuges been washed ay by the flood? and does some terrible disaster r its streams of bitterness along every channel of ar broken and bleeding heart? If it be so, as long you see no hand in it but chance, no deity but icient,—as long as you see something in it that ght have been otherwise if you had only done this,— it might have been the very reverse if you had only oided that,—so long you will run to other refuges : e to amusement, another to business, another to ht reading, and all to something else, only to return ain, and feel you have been drinking from broken terns; and the despondency that was so deep will aggravated into blank and terrible despair. But en, from the midst of this calamity, whatever it be, u can look up, and see a celestial presence, and feel e hand that smites was nailed to the cross for us, and not but be the minister of love,—that it is not in ath, but in chastisement, that God has done this,— at it was not a Judge, nor an avenging Deity, but Our Father, which art in heaven,"—then you can say, Thy will be done: and in every attribute of thine I n find a sweet chamber of repose; and in the ocean thy love I can bury all my fears; and from thy and lips, my Father, I can hear these blessed words, 'Come, my people, enter into thy chambers, and ut thy doors about thee, and hide thyself, as it were, : a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.' " nd charmed and fascinated by the music and the

preciousness of the invitation, I will answer, "In shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, O God, until all these calamities be 'overpast.'" But suppose worse than any outward calamity that can befall us of a personal and social nature,—suppose we are placed in the midst of some very bitter and sore bereavement,—what is your experience? Very few have not passed through this. Oh, how dim does gold become! how pale does all the pageantry of life look! how do crowns and coronets seem toys and baubles in the midst of some great and overwhelming stroke of bitter bereavement! The light of your eyes has been darkened; the treasure of your heart is gone; earth to your eyes is disenchanted of its beauty; and all life has lost its loveliness, because it cannot be shared with one whose accents were music—whose presence was sunshine—and you are altogether desolate. It was no unmeaning accident, that calamity you so poignantly deplore; it was no eruption from Satan or from beneath, but a summons from your Father from above. Nothing could have done it without the cognizance or the permission of God. If God be in the minutest eddies and windings of individual life, can I ever suppose that God has no concern in a soul's emergence from its shrine, and its entrance into glory? If I can see it was not an accident,—if I can feel it was not in wrath, and that the Lord was in it at its beginning, in its middle, and at its end,—I will lift up mine eyes to the everlasting hills, and I will say, "It is the Lord; the Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

There is a beautiful Jewish legend, which illustrates *exactly what I mean*. "A Rabbi had two beloved

children ; they died. He was absent from home. His wife carried the dead babes to her chamber, laid them on a bed, and spread a white linen cloth over them. The Rabbi returned at eventide, and inquired for his children. His wife placed wine and bread before him. 'Where are my sons?' said the Rabbi. The wife said, 'Not very far off.' She then said, 'Rabbi, with thy permission I will propose a question to you.' He said, 'Say on.' She said, 'A few days ago a person entrusted some jewels, very precious jewels, to my custody; and now the owner demands that I should give them back.' The Rabbi said, 'This is a question, my wife, that you should not have thought it necessary to ask of me; would you hesitate to restore to every one his own?' 'No,' said she, 'but I thought that it was best not to restore them without making thee acquainted with it.' She then conducted the Rabbi to the bedchamber, and removed the linen covering from the dead bodies. 'Ah,' said the Rabbi, 'my children, my children; the light of mine eyes, the light of my heart.' The mother turned away and wept bitterly. At length she said, 'Rabbi, didst thou not tell me that we must not be reluctant to restore what we have in trust to keep? The Lord gave, O Rabbi, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' And the Rabbi lifted up his voice weeping, and said, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord; and blessed be his holy name for ever and for ever.'" Such is a beautiful comment upon the words, "It is the Lord." Let not then the Jewish Rabbi eclipse in his trust the Christian priest. It is God's mighty hand—it is useless to resist it; it is God's loving hand—it is wickedness to try to resist. As we

think of the children of those who have gone before, of wives taken from their husbands, and parents from children, let us remember they enter, in the beautiful language of Isaiah, from which the Rabbi received his inspiration, into rest ; they rest from their labours, each one walking in his uprightness. The dead in Christ have exchanged the rags of time for the shining robes of immortality and of glory ; they have left the corruptible and frail residence of this earthly tabernacle, for a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens ; they have ceased from labour, not from life ; they have begun to live as they never lived before ; and if we could only see through the dim curtain that intercepts the bright glories of the future from the cold, damp shadows of this corruptible life in which we live, instead of sorrowing that dear ones have preceded us to the everlasting rest, we should break forth irrepressibly into the words of the Psalmist of old, and say too, " Oh that we also had wings, that we might flee away, and be at rest." No less beautiful than the Rabbi's words are those of the poet :—

" There is no flock, however watched and tended,
But one dead lamb is there ;
There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,
But hath one vacant chair.

" There is no death : what seems so is transition ;
This life of mortal breath
Is but a suburb of the life elysian,
Whose portal we call death."

We have seen first of all that God is holy ; secondly, that he leaves not sin without its retribution ; that *in all the future* God will be, just as he has been in

all the past; that in overwhelming calamities, in strokes of what seems to us judgment, God is; and we have learned by the illustration of the Rabbi, and by the sweet words of the poet, that there is no affliction, no sorrow, no bereavement, so intensely and entirely bitter, that it cannot be sweetened by drops from this fountain of life; till the sufferer shall say at length, "The cup that my Father has given me to drink, shall I not drink it?"

All of us ought to look to the contingency of a dying day; all of us will not be spared till the Resurrection and the Life shall come; some will be called to him before He comes to us. Do we ever contemplate this? Do we regard it as a fancy, a dream, or a solemn, deeply interesting, momentous reality? Truths too often rush through our ears and sweep through our memories and our understandings, but without leaving deep impressions. But whether we expect it or not, a dying bed must come; and to be able to say, when the heart begins to falter, weary with the march of life—when the taper that has burnt amid these earthly damps so dimly, comes at length to be quenched—"It is the Lord"—this is peace. If we have recognised the Lord in life, we shall not despond when we go from the life that now is to the better life that is yet to come. For after all, what is death? It is the proprietor taking home what is his; it is our Father calling his children to his presence; elevating us from the low levels on which we grovel, to that sunny table-land, where all is brightness and blessedness for ever.

Blessed thought—"It is the Lord!" In all life's trials—in *all life's sorrows*, may we feel this not as

a dead dogma, but a living truth, inspiring the heart, giving peace to the conscience, and applied by the Holy Spirit of God, making us not only holier, but happier men. Let us therefore daily and prayerfully study God's word; there is no book to be compared with it. Let us also study the experience of God's people. Hear, for instance, the words of such a one as Paul: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong." In the darkest night some of the brightest flowers blossom; in silence some of the sweetest sounds are heard. The apostle Paul so felt, "for I know in whom I have believed; and that he is able to keep what I have committed to him against that day." In the next place, that you may feel this truth in all its force, study God—your relationship to him—his relationship to you. Eli knew God, and therefore Eli's conviction of approaching retribution did not precipitate him into despair; he knew that it was in love that God would thus visit his house with terrible tribulation. To have God as our God alone, even in the utter desolation of all created things, is to have peace, even the peace that passeth understanding. Is the believer afflicted? He prays. Is he happy? He sings psalms. His afflictions and his blessings equally bring him to God. All that God does to us here, if we be his children, is love. If you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons. And then finally, if we think what this God is: if he were *not omniscient*, he would not see all our sufferings; if

he were not omnipotent he would not be able to help us; if he were not wise he would not see what is best for us; and if he were not love he would not make all things work for good to us. But because he is omniscient, not the poorest Christian can suffer one pang that his eye does not see as intensely as if it were the only thing in the universe; and because he is omnipotent, therefore he can help where he sees help is needed; and because he is wise he will help in such a way as will meet the emergency; and because he is love he will make all things work for good to them that love Him. Therefore we will welcome his will, whether it comes to us in bridal garment or in sad funereal robe; we will never forget that "as a Father pitieth his children, so doth the Lord pity us;" or what is richer and stronger still, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you:" thus we stand on the Tabor of our glorious transformation; thus we live in the temple of our deepest tranquillity; this will be music to our ears—"It is the Lord; let him do what he will, for what he wills shall be our will, and our good, as it must be his praise and eternal glory."

DEFEAT.

CHAPTER IV.

CONFLICT. ISRAEL WORSTED. CAUSE OF FALSE CONFIDENCE.
ISRAEL'S SHOUT. WONDERING OF THE PHILISTINES. ISRAEL
CUT TO PIECES IN ANOTHER BATTLE. DISASTROUS EFFECTS.

“THE word of Samuel came to all Israel,” does not mean that he instructed them to pursue the disastrous course, the story and the issues of which are recorded in this chapter. If they had followed his advice they would not have taken that course. It merely implies that now that he had risen to be able to do so, he preached as a prophet the word of truth, and the coming and predicted judgments that Israel's sin was sure, and that right soon, to draw upon it. The story recorded in this chapter needs scarcely any comment; it is in its grand simplicity full of expression, eloquence, and true pathos. We read simply that Israel went out as before to battle against the Philistines—whom they were bound to uproot from the land of Canaan—and pitched beside a place called by a name suggestive of a glorious recollection—“The place where God has helped;” and the Philistines pitched in Aphek. The Philistines set themselves in array against Israel; and Israel was smitten before the *Philistines*: a result that ought to have taught them

its appropriate lesson; for they had been distinctly told that as long as they were faithful to the God of Israel, one should chase a thousand; but as soon as they should prove unfaithful to him, undutiful to his law, and wilfully as a nation should traverse his holy will, that moment disaster in the camp, confusion in the cabinet, disorder and distress, would be the inevitable consequences.

When this came to pass, the elders of Israel very properly exclaimed, "Why has God smitten us to-day? Something is wrong; what is it?" The last thing poor man suspects is that he himself is at fault; and the first thing that he is prone to do is to lay the fault somewhere else, anywhere but on himself. And in this instance they stupidly and ignorantly supposed that they ought to have taken the ark with them, under the superstitious or the Romish notion that a sacred symbol will always be a palladium and a bulwark of safety. They therefore sent for the ark—the ark—from its peaceful and quiet nook at Shiloh, and brought it, with Hophni and Phinehas, evil and depraved persons; who like many evil and depraved persons, had a superstitious veneration for certain sacred and traditional symbols, imputing efficacy where no efficacy is; forgetting that till sin be pardoned there can be no prosperity, and that sacred things only become a savour of death to them who knowingly and wilfully live in the gross infringement of God's holy law. When the ark was brought into the midst of the camp, Israel, in the spirit of true idolatry, with no penitence for the past, with no sense of their own demerit, shouted, as if now all was sure *to be right*, and shouted till their voices rose to

heaven, and rebounded from the earth, and the earth rang again. The Philistines on hearing this shout wondered first of all what it could mean : they soon learned that the ark of the Lord, of which they had heard, was come into the camp. The Philistines began to be alarmed ; they supposed, having no better teaching than the Jews on this occasion, that destruction would fall upon Philistia, because this symbol had come amongst their enemies ; they thought that the ark was the very God that the people worshipped, just as they had their own god Dagon, and other gods made of wood, that they also worshipped. They believed that the ark was the God of Israel whom the Hebrews invoked ; and Israel here acted as if it had been so, giving to a sacred symbol that veneration, confidence, and trust which are due only to Him whose shadow and prefiguration it was. The officers of the Philistines addressed their men—"Never mind ; be strong ; quit yourselves like men, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews : " their leaders appealed to their memory, to their love of freedom, to their hatred of the Hebrews, whom they had kept as slaves, and drudges, and hewers of wood, and drawers of water ; and the Philistines under this heroic address fought, and Israel, notwithstanding the presence of the ark, was smitten till every man fled to his tent, and three thousand infantry bit the dust.

This second disaster, following so rapidly on the first, ought to have shown them there was something in their conduct or position morally wrong. There ran, therefore, a man of Benjamin and told Eli what had happened ; and the old man, when *he heard that the ark of the Lord was taken*, being

old, and heavy, and blind, fell backward and died. Phinehas' wife, when she heard of all these disasters, felt that God had forsaken and forgotten them; and she died, the ruling passion—and what a glorious passion!—strong in death, love to God, and sympathy with his cause, saying with her last breath, “The glory is departed from Israel; for the ark of God is taken!” This most touching theme we will consider in our next.

TREMBLING FOR THE ARK OF THE LORD.

“And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching for his heart trembled for the ark of God.”—1 SAMUEL iv. 13.

THE New Testament has not superseded,—it has only illuminated the Old; and of both it is equally true—“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable;” and of the Old Testament it is specially true—“These things happened to them for ensamples or instructive lessons to us.” We cannot read the Bible without seeing that each book is replete with its own peculiar instruction. Moses, the instructive law-giver; Aaron, the devout high priest; Joshua, the victorious soldier; Eli, the venerable priest,—all present various phases, aspects, and illustrations of the same great truth. The Bible seems to have been lived rather than to have been spoken or written. In this book is the early education of the human race; inspiration is the lesson-book—God himself the teacher. As the centuries roll on they write no wrinkles upon the brow of this book; it is still young, fresh and beautiful—it shines in all the splendour of its first kindling; the world is behind it, not before it. “God, who at sundry times”—that is, before the flood, after the flood, among the patriarchs, and under the law, *and with the prophets*, “and in divers manners,”

sometimes by visions, by the burning bush, by dreams, by personal communication—"spake to our fathers, hath in these last days spoken to us"—and blessed be his name, how plainly, how intelligibly, how profitably!—"by his Son, who made the worlds." This Bible is the truth—not dead, but living truth; not circumstantial, but essential truth; not local, but catholic truth. Reason and the Bible, the first supplementing the last, leads to scepticism or rationalism; tradition and the Bible, the former supplementing the latter, leads to Romanism; the Holy Spirit and the Bible, the first instructing the reader, the second perfect and complete, is Protestant and saving Christianity.

The incident recorded in this chapter is not one of the least important of those we have been reading. In the previous chapter is a beautiful instance of meek submission on the part of this aged priest, which constitutes the redeeming trait in his character: "It is the Lord; let him do to me what seemeth unto him good." Here we have another aspect of the same character, which we now proceed to examine. In the distance is a battle-field; the breath of heaven carrying to Shiloh the shouts of the camp, and the noises that are its necessary accompaniments. The Israelites are defeated. Determined again to venture on the issues of battle, they send for the ark of the Lord; they bring it into the midst of the guilty camp. Instead of repenting of their sins, and seeking forgiveness from its Lord, they trust superstitiously to the sacred symbol, and look for victory to it. In another part of the same scene there sits by the *wayside the aged priest* in Shiloh, anxious, full of

fears and forebodings, earnestly inquiring if any tidings have come from the battle-field, having, what is often in the human heart, a fiercer battle within than was waged upon the field without—conscious of sin, grieved at what he saw, verging on despondency and despair, and anxious to know what were the issues of that conflict, having a stake in it greater perhaps than any priest or Levite in all Israel. It is necessary, however, to explain here what this ark was. It was a chest of precious wood, about five feet long by two and a half feet in breadth and depth, and the lid of it was beaten gold, called the propitiatory or the mercy-seat. When it was placed in the holy of holies, the glory of God, called the *shechinah*, alighted upon it; two cherubim, made, it is supposed, in the likeness of human beings, with outstretched wings, the tips touching each other over the mercy-seat, looked down on the lid—a fact Peter seems to allude to when he says, “Into these things the angels desire to look.” That it was of a typical nature is evident from what the apostle says—“Christ, our propitiatory or our mercy-seat.” Inside of this chest there was a portion of the manna that fell in the desert, a memorial of past mercy; the rod of Aaron, that burst into blossom miraculously, to denote God’s presence with his high priest; also the tables of the testimony. It is called sometimes in Scripture “the ark of the covenant,” sometimes “the ark of God’s strength,” sometimes “the glory of Israel,” and always, as matter of fact, it was the symbol of a present and a propitious God; so that Israel, dutifully observant of his holy law, witnessing that visible and sacramental memorial of a promise-keeping God, *might know that he would never leave them, and that*

he would never forsake them. The progress of this ark was signalled by the greatest miracles in Israel's march : the walls of Jericho fell down before its approach ; Dagon was smitten from his pedestal, the wooden god falling before the presence of the symbol of the God of Israel. Its history is explained by endless allusions in the Old Testament ; its prefiguration was evidently Christ in his blessed gospel, the shechinah on the mercy-seat of his people Israel. This ark was no fixture ; it was removed from place to place, and often God took it from one spot where his name had not been honoured as he required, and located it where the people were prepared to do him homage, and give him pure and spiritual worship. He appeals to this movable character of the ark of the covenant in such words as these—" Go into my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first ; and see what I did there." And again, " God forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh." If this ark be a prefiguration of Christ, the church of Christ in the midst of a land is not necessarily a fixture ; the gospel in the midst of a people is not tied to them for ever : God watches the use that the people make of it, and continues it or removes it as may be best for his glory, and for their chastisement and good.

What are some of those things that should make the Elis of modern days, the Christians of the age in which we live, tremble lest there be removed from their presence what is better, dearer to us than the ark to Israel—the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ ? Have we any reason to tremble in reference to the continuation of the gospel in the midst of us ? We should *dread and deprecate* the removal of the gospel from

us, because it is the source of the purest and loftiest motives, and the cement of our social blessings. There is not a home whose brightest light comes not from it—not a hearthstone that has not its dearest warmth from it; nor a babe upon its mother's knee that is not better because Jesus died, and evangelists have written, and apostles preached, the glorious gospel. If it be true that righteousness exalts a people, that the spring and parentage of all that righteousness is the gospel of Jesus Christ, its removal would be the greatest calamity; and they that feel our great unworthiness may often well tremble for the ark of the Lord. If it be true also that our institutions, hospitals, asylums, are all the children of this blessed religion—for such institutions were unknown to heathendom—if the central tree in the midst of the land be struck down, its shelter and its fruits perish also. Shut up this fountain, and there are no streams to make glad the city of our God; remove from our midst this nutritive element, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and death lives and life dies, and the land—witness other lands in similar calamities—must breed all monstrous, all prodigious things, unutterable, abominable, worse than fable yet has feigned. If we regard Christianity in its secondary influence, as a spring of beneficence; if we cannot look at an hospital, a charity, an asylum, without seeing the cross upon it; if we cannot hear of goodness, providing for the poor and the destitute, without thinking of the gospel, every one that loves the happiness of his kind must pray that it may be continued in the midst of us, and must tremble if for a moment he has reason to fear its *removal*. *But this is a secondary light compared*

with others. Man needs not only to have food to eat, and raiment to put on, and a house to shelter him, but all of us must leave this world; every one, without exception, is immortal, and every one—awful calamity!—is born an heir of immortal misery, and must continue so till he be born again, and made an heir of eternal joy. The great question all nature yearns to find an answer to—the great inquiry that every one that feels time is not his all, must be, Is there a way to heaven? What is the way that guides to its blessed repose? Is there forgiveness of sin? is there any name in which we can be saved? “Men and brethren, what must I do to be saved?” “How shall man be just with God?” These are the most vital questions man can ask, the most important; they press for an answer. In vain we taste life’s choicest blessings here, if we have no clear, sure, definite hope and prospect when the sun of life shall set in the western horizon, and the great light breaks from the east that shall be quenched no more. If the gospel alone gives an answer to this question, how important that its gleaming page should be read over all the land—that its glad sound should ring from earth and reverberate from heaven in the hearing of increasing millions. Is there a way to heaven? There is, and it is explained in this chart, it is depicted in this map, with such perspicuity, so clearly and sharply, that he that runs may read, and the wayfaring man need not necessarily err therein. And what is the way? Not church, nor chapel, nor sect, nor system. It is not one whit easier to be saved by a Protestant church than it is by a Romish one; it is no easier to be saved by the tracts of the *Tract Society* than it is by the folios of the

fathers ; it is not one whit easier to be saved by our sacraments than it is by Rome's sacraments ; and for the very simple reason, that the way to heaven is neither a church, nor a chapel, nor a cathedral, nor a sacrament, nor a tract, nor a priest, nor a folio, nor a father. " I am the way ; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." And this book explains it so clearly that the most cursory reader cannot fail to apprehend and comprehend it. Here is the preciousness of this gospel. Extinguish this heavenly light, and the darkness it would leave behind would be intolerable ; strike down this sun from his socket, and all nature would be plunged in ceaseless night ; we should be emigrants indeed, without a hope or a home ; widows and orphans, without a Father's voice or a ray from heaven to cheer and comfort us—with a deep sense that we can never cease to be, and with no conviction that it shall be ever well with us. All the instincts of our nature in such a case would plead with irresistible eloquence, and urge human nature, as it urged the patriarch upon the plains of Uzz, to curse God, and lie down and die.

But if these two, the temporal blessings which the gospel spreads,—in their place most precious,—and the bright and inextinguishable hopes to which it points and to which it makes known the way, be reasons why we should highly value this blessed gospel, let us try to ascertain those reasons on account of which God withdraws privileges, the existence of which must make Christians tremble for the presence and the perpetuity of the ark of the Lord. One of the reasons that provoke God to withdraw the gospel from a *people, is their inadequate appreciation of its excel-*

lence. God will not allow a thankless possessor to be a long possessor, or a happy possessor. A man who has plenty, and does not thank God for it from his heart, and make a right use of it with his hand, will not be a long, or if a long he will not be a happy proprietor. What is true of temporal is true of eternal things. God will not allow such inestimable mercies as an open Bible, a preached gospel, precious sacraments, joyful and abundant opportunities to be misused, abused, or thanklessly enjoyed. Are we thankful for this holy book? do we thoroughly appreciate the height and the depth of the preciousness of this glorious gospel? Have we ever considered what humanity would be without it? Have we ever lifted up our hearts when we compared our own land with less favoured lands, and thanked God that we were born amid the chimes of church bells and the peacefulness of Sabbath days, and the blessings, privileges, and graces of an open, a free, an unfettered gospel? If we have no such thankfulness to God, we have no just appreciation of his goodness; and a blessing so great as the ark of the Lord in the midst of us, will not be continued unless our hearts adequately appreciate its value, and thank God, the giver and the author of all. In the second place, we may well tremble lest God remove the ark of the Lord if we misuse, or abuse, or neglect the great blessings which he has vouchsafed to us. Do we listen to the gospel as to an old familiar sound? Does it leave no deep, lasting impressions on the heart? Are you charmed by its music, but unmoved by its motives, its warnings, its hopes, its thrilling prospects? Is the world still unsanctified? is the church still unaroused? Does the preaching of the

truth fall upon your ears like music in the desert, where there is no ear to hear; and upon your heart like dew upon the granite rock, no foliage responding in grateful thankfulness? If it be so, it is essential for the glory of God, it is necessary for the chastisement and the real well-being of humanity, that blessings inadequately appreciated, or perversely used, should be withdrawn. The seven churches of Asia are the standing witnesses to this truth; the barren fig-tree is a scriptural proof that it is the law of God's providential government in the church and in the world. Another cause why the ark may be removed, and we may therefore tremble, is when like the guilty Israelites we attach to the institutions of God a veneration that is exclusively due to his own great and holy name. If we give to any symbol the glory that belongs to him; if we call baptism regeneration of heart, and look to it instead of the Holy Ghost; if we call the Lord's Supper transubstantiation or consubstantiation, instead of looking above it to the Lord Jesus Christ; if we place reason in the room of the Spirit in reading God's word; if we put the church in the room of Him who is the Lord of the church; if we look to the most precious things that God himself has instituted, and give them a veneration beyond their due, we grieve God, and he will withdraw them from us. The Israelites gave to the ark the glory that belonged to its author, and God punished them for their grievous idolatry. We may at the present day give to the institutions of the church what is the exclusive glory of the Lord of the church, and thus provoke his judgments. We must never forget that it is possible to *give to things sacred a veneration as criminal as de-*

secration. He desecrates the ordinance who makes a god of it; and while he seems to us to reverence it with a veneration beautiful and holy, in God's sight he commits a crime that provokes the Almighty to withdraw the presence of it altogether. God will not give to the noblest thing he has made, or the holiest thing he has consecrated, the glory and the honour that are exclusively due to him. Rome is a standing memorial of this; she has turned baptism into an exorcism; the Lord's Supper into an idol; she has made the priests gods, and the people slaves; she has shut the Bible, and opened the breviary; she has buried truth, the truth of God, in the traditions of the priest, and therefore the ark has left her; and on her shrines, and her altars, and in her basilicas, and her cathedrals, though their spires shine so gloriously in rising and in setting suns, there is legible to the eye of every enlightened Christian an inscription that is every day passing more and more into the actual—"Ichabod, Ichabod; the glory is departed from her."

A reason why Christians may sometimes be led to tremble for the safety of the ark of the Lord, is, when they see those that are the professed followers of Christ using all the blessings that they have for their own selfish enjoyment, and not seeking, by all the means that God in his providence has placed in their power, to diffuse those blessings among others. The great law of the Christian economy is—God gives that you may give. He that has been the largest receiver by grace, is bound to be the largest giver and distributor by duty. If then we have received these precious blessings, this great salvation, this open Bible, *this free gospel*, what is our duty? Not to

monopolise it. God saves a man not for that man's happiness as the ultimate thing, but for the happiness of thousands as the next thing, and the glory of himself as the ever present and always operative thing. If we take the blessings that God has given us, and try by a selfish monopoly to enjoy all their sweetness, whilst we withhold from thousands, not on the other side of the sea, but on the other side of the brick wall that separates the palace from the hovel,—the means of grace, the opportunities of salvation,—we may well tremble lest the blessings be speedily removed ; for God will not suffer long or prosperously to live in his world so unnatural a phenomenon as a man always receiving and never giving. Of all deplorable sights upon earth, not the least is that of a man who, instead of being a fountain ever overflowing in beneficence, in missionary sympathy, is only a vortex ever sucking in, and seeking to monopolise.

God withdraws great blessings on account of our infrequent use or neglect of them. One extreme consists in idolising the blessings God gives ; as we may put the Bible, the church, the sacrament, the priest, in the room of God, and thus peril our privileges. The opposite extreme is the misuse, or abuse, or neglect of them. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ?" Do you then wait on the worship of God every Sabbath ? or does the incidental shower or the passing cloud, that would never keep you from the exchange, prove to your consciences a satisfactory excuse for not worshipping in the sanctuary at all ? Do you come to the Lord's table as to a scene of privilege, as to a spot of holy, happy, and blessed *communion* ? Do you read God's word, not as a

penance, but as a pleasure? Do you study whatever casts light upon that book as the most sacred and solemn obligation? Do you, in other words, seize the opportunities as they pass, the means of grace as they rise to the judgment-seat to witness for or against you; and devote not your whole soul, and time, and attention, but the great and governing portion of all, to the service of God, and the spiritual well-being of your fellow men?

Conscious sins make us dread judgments. Whenever a man feels sin in his conscience as a reality, till he knows the gospel he forebodes judgment, desolation, wrath. And whenever a man is placed under affliction, tribulation, bereavement, distress, the consciousness of sin within him makes him construe the visitation as penal, though it may be in God's arrangements a chastisement for his good. Eli recollected all his sins, and felt them in his conscience as he sat by the wayside; he knew that he had left undone what he ought to have done, and done what he ought not to have done; every whisper therefore on the wings of the wind, every half-spent echo of the noise of battle, every shadow that swept past, and every traveller that crossed the road, suggested to a man whose sins were prophets within him, rebuking all he had done, a foreboding that the ark of God was taken, or if not taken, in jeopardy, and therefore the old man's heart trembled for the ark of the Lord. And even the holiest Christian has so much of the old leaven within him that he is often tempted to suspect that God, even when he comes in mercy, is coming to deal with him after his sins, and to reward him according to his iniquity; *for in this world the holiest man has only*

attained a height so far above his fellows that he can see more clearly the sovereign grace that looks down, and repudiate more entirely the phantom of human merit that would look aspiringly and proudly upwards. He who has in his heart most of the light of God sees his sins to be darkest; and he who has in his conscience most of the grace that forgives, feels the sin that is forgiven to be sorest in the sight of God. If we are at this moment living in sin, conscious and known sin, that we ourselves can lay the finger on, and specify, and name, and define, we have no right to expect a blessing; we may tremble lest our privileges be withdrawn from us, or we withdrawn from the privileges.

A reason why we may tremble for the ark of the Lord, is, when not the noise of the camp which Eli heard, and into the midst of which the ark was carried, but the still more sickening and shocking noise, that of the church, loudens and deepens in the midst of us. The Israelites sinned by placing the holy ark amid the collision of human passions; and may we not be sinning in indulging in those angry and sectarian rivalries, those ecclesiastical quarrels, those disputes about discipline and mere ceremonials, which poison the very air we breathe, and render hopeless the growth of Christianity in the midst of us? For vital truth we must contend earnestly—against deadly error we should protest with all our might; but in those things on which Christians differ, those minor and circumstantial things which we shall not see eye to eye until the very margin of the millennial morn, in these we should be satisfied to agree to differ. But *is it not true, to use the similitude in the chapter, that*

too many care less what becomes of the ark, and far more who shall be the drivers of the oxen that draw the ark? Is it not too true that men are more anxious about shibboleth than they are about righteousness, and peace, and joy,—the constituent elements of the kingdom of heaven? Storms may be necessary to purify the air, but sweet flowers do not blossom in them; controversy may be necessary to lay the foundation of the church, but it is in calm and in sunshine that its superstructure is best reared. And as soon as we have secured what every day is becoming more and more secure, the ascendancy of essential truth, so soon we should lapse into comparative indifferentism as to the circumstantials in which it is set.

We may tremble for the ark of the Lord, when we see abounding in the midst of any land great, grievous, and soul-destroying errors. Poor Eli was not only conscious of the sins of the church, but he saw the ark exposed to the grasp of the Philistines; and when he heard that the ark was in the midst of them, the good old man's heart trembled. While evangelical truth is making way more and more amid all classes every day, yet one cannot shut one's eyes to the awful errors that seem to loom up from every point of the horizon, and to give token of an approaching conflict, the last and the severest of all. One party strives to exhaust the gospel of all its vitality and its value, till a mere dead, cold shell, the memorial of wreck and disaster, is all that remains behind. Another party would load that gospel with cumbrous ceremonies, till it is crushed to *the earth, and the ark is covered, and the glory is*

quenched, and there remains but a splendid ceremonial, where religion lies dead, embosomed in the splendid trappings of the tomb. The sceptic from Germany, denies all that is supernatural, reduces Christianity to a human story, with uninspired and human writers. Rome is busy dislodging every truth by a corresponding error, till the Church of Christ, like the ancient ship Argos, retains the name, while every apostolical plank is removed, and new and strange ones substituted in their place. We have in the midst of our own camp cold champions, who will not speak out lest preferment should forsake them,—cold defenders, who are afraid to give offence by speaking boldly the truth as it is in Christ Jesus ; and all these things taking a stronger hold, till men at last call religion dogmatism, and an earnest Christian a fanatic ; and anything like thorough belief in what God has spoken as mediæval monkery, fit for monks and nuns, but not for the enlightened merchants and princely senators of the nineteenth century. If these things be so, we do not tremble for the ultimate issues ; but we may tremble lest God should teach us the grandeur of our position, the preciousness of our privileges, by removing them from us for a season, and writing Ichabod where his own name has been inscribed before.

Above all, what explains all this anxiety for the ark of the Lord in the case of Eli, and will best explain it, as the summary of all, in the case of every true Christian, is ardent love to the ark, unmingled affection to the gospel, and to Him who is its author. Just mark this feature in the case of Eli. A messenger rushes to his presence who had left the din and *the shouts of battle*, and tells Eli that the tide of war

had prevailed against Israel, that its banners were trampled in the dust, and his country degraded before the whole world. Eli was a patriot; he must have deeply felt the calamity that had fallen upon his fatherland; but he suffered this, and was silent. The messenger adds as a distinct fact that there had been a great slaughter of his countrymen, and much blood had been shed upon the battle-field, and thirty thousand of Israel's noblest infantry were gathered to a gory grave. Eli was a humane and a feeling man, and he must have deeply felt that; but he makes no remark; he has grace to bear it. Then the messenger states a third fact; that his own and only sons, Hophni and Phinehas, had fallen in the strife, and lay dead upon the field. Eli was a parent, and had parental affections, deep, and strong, and full; but he meekly bows his head, patiently resigns his heart, and feels, "It is the Lord; let him do what to him seemeth good." But the messenger added a fourth fact—that the ark of the Lord was taken: and when he told Eli this—for Eli was a Christian, and God's glory and the salvation of souls, the weightiest and most momentous concern in the old man's heart—and he heard that the ark of the Lord was taken, the current of his emotions rose like an overwhelming tide against the sands, burst the channels in which they flowed, and he bowed his head and fell to the earth, because the ark of the Lord was taken. What love was here—what supreme love! love to his country, which was right; love to humanity, which was right; love to his children, which was right; but a love that superseded and overwhelmed all these—his love to his God; a *catastrophe here he was unable to bear, and he fell*

a victim to his own great defects, but a martyr to his attachment and affection to his God.

And as if this instance of love was not sufficiently touching, one still more beautiful and tender is recorded at the close of this chapter. When the wife of one of Eli's sons heard that her husband was dead, she could bear that; when she heard that her father-in-law was dead, she could bear that; but when she heard that the ark of the Lord was taken, that was more than she could bear; and when the women that stood by announced what always thrilled a Jewish mother's heart, and was her greatest joy, and her deepest expectancy—that a son was born—she felt no joy in what was a Hebrew mother's greatest joy; she baptised the babe in her dying moments, Ichabod, "the glory is departed, for the ark of the Lord is taken," and she fell asleep, and entered into rest, and ceased from her labour, and was in glory. What love was here—what deep, what absorbing affection! If these in that economy so loved the symbol of a present God, do we love our privileges equally? How much do you give either to maintain the existence, or to spread and urge on the progress of the everlasting gospel? Let every man review the profits of the year; let him count all he has laid out in what is lawful and just—what we neither wish nor ask you to lessen—and compare with that, as sensible men, what you have done for Christ. The question will be asked at the judgment-seat, when God says, You have done much for yourselves, much for your home, much for your family, much for your country, and you have done well; but what have you done for me; *what have you sacrificed to serve me?* Is there any

one soul in your home, in your parish, in your neighbourhood, in your country, in the wide world, that can witness at the judgment-seat—"I am happy because that man did what he could to enlighten my mind, impress my heart, and show me the way to heaven?" If an angel from heaven were to come down to earth, and hear for the first time what the gospel is, and witness the cold reception it meets with, his instant inference would be—"There is not a human being present that believes it; they must regard it as a splendid tale, a thrilling fable, of no vitality in itself and of no value to them that hear it." Let this be your prayer—"Search me;" and any man that can pray this one prayer in the 139th Psalm, from the very depths of his soul, that surely must be a Christian:—"Search me, O God, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way within me; and I pray earnestly that thou wouldest lead me in the way everlasting." The gospel departs from an individual that misuses it, just as it is taken from a land that does not appreciate it. Of its ultimate triumph we have no fear and no doubt. It may change its locality, but it will not forsake the earth till the whole earth is covered with its glory. The ark is a movable thing; the candlestick may be removed from one church to another, and from all the seven of Asia to the churches of Europe; the ark may be removed from Shiloh to the temple, or from both; but the Church of God is still advancing. When it seems to us to pause, or even to retrograde, it is only accumulating its strength for yet greater and more victorious issues. There may be the partial obscuration of the church; like the moon, she may be eclipsed,

but it is only for a little ; and like the moon, she will emerge from the eclipse more beautiful than when she came under its shadow, till the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, and all the people shall bless him, and all the people be blessed in him.

THE CAPTIVE ARK.

CHAPTER V.

THE ARK TAKEN. ABUSE OF ORDINANCES. THE ARK IN THE
TEMPLE OF DAGON. DAGON FALLS. JUDGMENTS ON THE
HEATHEN.

IN the previous chapter it appears that the children of Israel, who had forsaken the living God, and broken his law, found themselves, through some quarrel, in battle with the Philistines. In their distress they had recourse to the ark of the Lord as to a potent charm, and carried it into the din and collision of the battle-field. They thought that though they had sinned against God, the mere sacred symbol of his presence would, like an exorcism, repel the Philistines, and give them the victory over them. In other words, they gave to the symbol the reverence that was due to God; and they made their great veneration for the symbol the covert of great crimes, and a consecration to national and almost universal wickedness.

In this chapter we find the ark was taken by the Philistines, to humble the Israelites, and to teach them that there was nothing in the ark that could give a blessing in the absence of trust in and obedience to Him from whom the ark found its significance, and in *whose service and according to whose law it was to be*

venerated, revered, and cherished. They found, what has been always the case, that the excessive idolatry of an ordinance to-day, leads to the desecration and the destruction of the ordinance to-morrow. It was when the Israelites worshipped the brass serpent, that in just retribution it was ground to powder and cast into the waters. It is after men have made too much of a sacrament that a succeeding generation makes too little of it. The way to dishonour God, and to destroy the scriptural sacrament of baptism, is to put it into the room of the Holy Spirit, the reaction of which is to despise it altogether. The consequence of the excessive idolatry of the church practised by one party, has resulted in the utter despising of the church practised by another party. The tractarian party make the church a goddess; other excellent and pious men, but so far misguided in this matter, cast the church away altogether, deny a stated ministry, and many of the distinctive peculiarities of the Christian visible church in the midst of a land; the latter being the rebound from the former, desecration being always the reaction of excessive idolatry and veneration. So again in the Lord's Supper, the excessive worship of it which has been practised by some, will lead in its rebound to an undue disregard of it, as practised by others. The true way to preserve an ordinance is to give it the place that belongs to it, but ever to give to the Lord of the ordinance the supremacy that belongs to him. The Israelites worshipped the ark, trusted in it as a charm; they needed to see it taken captive by the Philistines, and placed, as here recorded, in the *temple of Dagon*, that they might learn the lesson I

am now trying to teach—that idolatry, or excessive veneration given to what is not God the one day, leads to the contempt for it, and the desecration of it in other circumstances next day.

We read that the Philistines brought it into the temple of their God. Some think it was contemptuously done, to show the superiority of their god; others think that it was on the principle observed by the Romans, who, when they conquered a nation, incorporated its gods and its religion with their own. When the Romans found Christianity spreading in the empire, one of the emperors offered a niche in the Pantheon, for Christ's image to occupy. The Pantheon was the place, as it literally means, for all the gods of all the world, and any nation that they conquered had only to present its image, and it would have its place or niche in the Pantheon. Christianity was offered a niche of the Pantheon, and a pedestal for the image of Christ. But the Christians repudiated the offer; they would not have the sheltering wings of the Roman eagle; they would not be satisfied with a portion of the temple; it must be supreme and exclusive, or it would not occupy a place or be made welcome there at all. These Philistines probably placed the ark in the temple of Dagon, just as a new god, to give it worship the same as they gave to Dagon, or they may have done it contemptuously. But whether the one way or the other, the result was that when next morning they came, they found that Dagon had fallen on his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. This Dagon was an image representing in the upper part a man, and ending in the

tail of a fish, a mermaid, pictures of which you may have seen, a fanciful creation, being the only likeness of it that I can refer to; and he was placed in a niche, and it was found next morning that he had fallen down, to teach them that Dagon had not that power or supremacy that they attributed to him,—the ignorant and stupid heathen requiring such a fact to persuade and convince them that this hideous idol had neither virtue, nor vitality, nor the power of self-preservation. Then they set him up again, bent upon their idolatry, thinking it was an accident, and that it could not be any divine interposition. Next morning, they found that the idol had again fallen down; that in the fall his hands had been knocked off the upper part of his body, which was the image of a man, and that nothing but the fishy tail, or, as it is here called contemptuously, the stump of Dagon was left to him. The priests of Dagon, instead of being persuaded that they were worshipping a piece of wood, and a very ugly piece, regarded the very spot on which he had fallen as sacred, because Dagon's palms or hands had touched it; and therefore they would not tread upon the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day—that is, the day in which this was written. Not satisfied with this, we read that they were visited with judgments, with all sorts of diseases and vermin, and made to feel that in taking the ark of the Lord captive, they had not taken really a victim, but they had given welcome to their own vanquisher, and begun what they could not arrest—their national ruin. And just as the Israelites needed to be taught that their idolatry of that symbol *was most hateful to God*, so the Philistines needed

to be taught that their desecration of that symbol was equally hateful to God. And therefore, instead of turning from dumb idols to serve the living God, we read that all they desired was what the Gergesenes desired of old, that Jesus should be taken from the midst of them, since he had brought judgments and tribulation upon their city, in order that their people might remain careless of their future destiny, while they purchased a short-lived present peace.

SEND AWAY THE ARK OF GOD

“So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people; for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.”—1 SAMUEL v. 11.

THIS portion of the chapter suggests important practical remarks illustrative of a great truth universally true; namely, that the use we make of a divine gift, or privilege from God, makes it a calamity or a blessing to us. Nothing, however painful, is a calamity if we have the grace to make the right and the sanctified use of it; nothing, however prosperous, will prove to us a blessing unless we have also and equally the grace to make a right use of it. The ark in the midst of the camp of Israel, in itself a divine gift, was no blessing, because they perverted it to idolatry; and the ark in the possession of the Philistines was no defence, because they did not estimate that divine symbol as God required. This great historic fact will apply to all the privileges, the mercies, the afflictions that we have. In the earlier days of the children of Israel, when they had grace to see in the presence of that little wooden chest a blessing when rightly and properly regarded, the approach of the ark *levelled with the dust* the battlements and towers of

Jericho; the moment that the priests that bore it touched the rolling floods of the Jordan, and though it overflowed its banks, yet it opened its bosom, and made a dry pathway for the feet of the children of Israel. It was in their experience, when they rightly understood it and rightly regarded it, what the pillar of cloud was by day, and the pillar of fire by night—a ceaseless miracle, a satisfying mercy, a mighty blessing. But afterwards, when the Israelites lost the due apprehension of the symbol, and fell into sin against the God of that symbol, though they brought it into the midst of the field of battle, victory did not perch upon their standards; on the contrary, in spite of its presence, and idolatrous worship, and therefore desecration, they met with disaster and defeat; and the Philistines carried off among their trophies the sacred symbol itself, the ark of the Lord. On the other hand, when the Philistines had the ark, that ark proved no blessing or benefit to them. They thought that as it had blessed Israel in former days it would bless them, yet the instant that they brought it into their temple, it showed it retained, if I might so call it, its ancient virtue, by their god falling from his pedestal on his face; because they knew not how to appreciate it, it could not be a blessing; and therefore judgments and diseases fell upon them, till they prayed that it might be taken away to Gath, because the hand of the Lord was heavy upon them. From all these historic facts, I draw the important lesson, which I will try to illustrate, that every divine gift, or privilege, or possession, misused, or abused, or perverted by idolizing it, or by not worthily accepting it, or by *trampling it* under foot, vindicates itself,

avenges the dishonoured God, and is in the issue no real blessing to us. In other words, blessings are not absolute, but relative; it depends upon the receiver what shall be to him a real beneficent possession, and what shall prove to him a real and sorrowful calamity.

We shall see this lesson illustrated even in the outer world. The winds of heaven fill the sails of the ocean ship, waft her across the waves to her distant harbour; enabling her to bridge the ocean, and thus bring man nearer unto man. But the same wind, in the shape of the tornado, the typhoon, or the hurricane, falling upon the vessel whose thoughtless crew was unprepared for it, buries its living freight and all its precious cargo in the ocean; and thus that very wind which is a mighty blessing when rightly, and skilfully, and watchfully managed, turns out a tremendous calamity when we do not prepare to receive it, and to make the use of it. The lightning of heaven, can be conducted quietly from the angry cloud into the peaceful bosom of its depository, the earth; or it can be made to convey messages, kind words, cabinet secrets, and national facts, and phenomena, and occurrences from capital to capital, across broad continents, in spite of deep seas, till man has at last, in one thing, been invested with a portion of the very power of deity, being able to make the red lightnings his messengers. But on the other hand, if this lightning is not received as it should be, or if we are unprepared for it, the shattered walls, the crumbling edifice, and the dead tenantry, tell us that in the bosom of the greatest blessings, may be latent the possibilities of the greatest *calamities*; and that it is not so much the thing itself,

as the intelligent use of the thing that makes the difference. The noontide sun fosters, warms, nourishes, and brings to maturity one fragrant flower, but it will scorch and burn another. That same sun when it guides one pilgrim across the desert towards his own home in comfort, falls with scorching rays upon another, and with intolerable force, till he droop and sink beneath it. That same sunshine that fills the eye, when is on its guard against injury, with all beautiful and fair symbols and images, may in an unwatchful hour fall upon the eye with such force as utterly to destroy it. Thus we might go over all the great powers of God's created world, and see that there is no power that has in its bosom a great blessing, that has not nestling beside it the possibility of a very great calamity. And the lesson that we draw from all this is that our use, our intelligent thankful use, and watchful use of it, determines very much what that thing shall be to us, either a blessing that will open the rolling tides of the Jordan, that will beat down obstructions in our march, or that will bring judgments upon us, till we pray that what historic fact has proved a grand blessing, may be taken away from us as an intolerable calamity and a curse.

Let us pass into the region in which we are more at home, namely, the word of God, and we shall see the very same truth illustrated. One apostle, for instance,—the Apostle John—says, "God is love." This is the cheering aspect of deity—love as witnessed on Calvary, in the grave of Arimathæa, at the day of Pentecost, or in the love that sits upon the throne. God is love in creation, love in providence; but above all, and *emphatically*, love in the gift of his Son, and in

the gospel that reveals him. I open the very same book and I find another apostle saying, with equal truth and equal propriety, "God is a consuming fire." You ask are these two compatible? I answer, perfectly. "God is love," just as the ark was a blessing to those that understand how, and where, and why, and in whom; and God is a consuming fire, just as the ark was a curse, to those that know not what it is, or why it is, or despise and condemn him. To those, for instance, that fly from sin to him who is revealed in Christ as the sin forgiver; to those that accept the offers of his mercy, and look for eternal life through the precious blood of his Son, "God is love;" but to those on the other hand, that turn his grace into licentiousness, that defy and rebel against him, or neglect his great salvation, and will have nothing of him, or either ignore or deny him, "God is a consuming fire." In other words, this consuming fire is all love, and light, and genial warmth to the poor traveller that looks up from his misery, and seeks to enjoy its light, and warmth, and beneficence: on the other hand, this love is the all consuming fire, and is full of dread retribution to those that spurn, despise, or as the apostle tells us, neglect it. Whether God shall be to me love, or whether he shall be to me the consuming fire, depends upon what I by his grace feel in reference to him, or think of him. As in the history of the Israelites, the cloud was all darkness to Pharaoh, but all brilliant and glorious sunshine to the children of Israel; as the Red Sea was a promenade to Israel but a deep and overwhelming sepulchre to all the *chariots* of Pharaoh; as the ark was a blessing at *the Jordan*, and a curse in the house of Dagon; so God

is to them that take him at his word, love, inexhaustible love ; love that pardons sin, the greatest sin, the worst of sins, in the greatest, and the worst, and the oldest of sinners. But on the other hand, he is to them that despise him, that reject him, that plunge into sin because grace abounds,—that say, Who is God, that we should obey him? that refuse to believe in his only begotten son—the consuming fire. In heaven his presence is an atmosphere of embracing love ; in hell his presence is an atmosphere of all consuming fire ; in the former there are showers of grace that sparkle with all the lights of glory ; in the latter there are streams of bitter and terrible retribution upon them that have rejected, neglected, and despised him. Thus we see that the character of God to us, is contingent upon what we are in our apprehension of, and relation to, him.

Let us turn to the gospel itself in which this God is revealed, and we shall see the same great truth come out. This gospel is either a blessing or a curse, according as we use, or misuse, or abuse it. We have a very remarkable proof of this in the gospel of Luke, where our Lord says, “Into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you ; notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.” In the case of the city that makes welcome the messenger of Christ, that messenger says, “The kingdom of heaven,”—*that is, the gospel*, “is come nigh unto you.”

But in the case of the city that rejects the messenger of Christ, it is added equally, "notwithstanding the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you;" showing, therefore, that this kingdom comes nigh to the wicked, as well as to the good, to the believer, and the unbeliever; only in the one case it is the savour of life—in the other case it is the savour of death unto death. We have, therefore, in the gospel itself, the evidence that it may be a blessing or it may be a curse, just according to the disposition and the spirit in which we receive it. The reception of the message is righteousness, peace, and joy; the rejection of the message is treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. The tremendous fact, a fact the depth, the weight, and the momentousness of which we cannot exaggerate, is this, that every one that hears the gospel preached plainly, intelligibly, never rises from his seat the same man that he was when he sat down to listen to that gospel: he has either moved one step nearer ruin, or he has moved one step nearer heaven; he is either more prepared next Sunday to repudiate the gospel, or more prepared to receive it with deeper, more thrilling, and joyous emotions. In other words, a process is constantly going on; so that just as the same sunshine hardens one object, as clay, and softens another object, as wax, this gospel acts upon one class, hardening, and upon another class, subduing, softening, sanctifying. It is no light remark, but a very just one, that habit is a second nature. If you were to sleep in the neighbourhood of a water-wheel, your sleep would be impossible during the first week, but by-and-by you would get so accustomed to it, *that you could not sleep without it.* A person that

sleeps in the crowded thoroughfares of London, ultimately feels the sound of the omnibus and carriage-wheels as a sort of lullaby; and when he goes to the country he complains that he cannot sleep. What an evidence of the force and power of habit! It is so with the preaching of the gospel; at first you are struck and impressed; you then get so accustomed to the sound that it acts as a lullaby, rather than a quickener of your heart, and feelings, and conscience; until at last you become what old Scotch divines call, "gospel hardened,"—the most expressive character of those who hear as God's people hear, but whose hearts, notwithstanding, go after covetousness. There is danger here we should most solemnly guard against—the possibility of being hardened, and treasuring up hardness of heart, by hearing constantly the gospel. It is in such cases that God removes the gospel, or removes us from it, that we may come back with a new and a profounder relish, and appreciate as we ought that blessed word which is the savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death. It is thus that the gospel itself may become either a blessing or a curse. What an awful thought, that in the bosom of that message which is good news, there should be latent the possibility of a curse! Out of some of nature's greatest sweets man may extract, it is said, the deadliest poison. The same stream that murmured of old by Jerusalem, and reflected the sheen of its towers, its palaces, and its gorgeous temple, now falls into the Dead Sea; ending, notwithstanding its holy and consecrated passages, in the region of the shadow of death. So neglected *opportunities become the sharpest avengers; rejected*

mercies are never forgotten ; at the last day it will be found that the light that we have trifled with and despised, will burst into the lightning that we cannot resist ; when the Son of man shall come in the clouds of heaven, as the lightning shineth from the east unto the west, and all flesh shall be gathered before him. Did we require an evidence of this singular indirect effect of the gospel, it would be in our own great cities and capitals. Is it not a remarkable fact that it is where you find a gospel in its greatest purity, and where it has raised its noblest trophies, that you will find also the most terrible heathenism and depravity ? In this great capital of London, this overgrown metropolis, which is more a province than a capital, we shall find sins, and crimes, and depravity, and heathenism, denser and intenser than in the depths of Africa, or amid the South Sea Islands. Is it not a most remarkable fact that the very light, as it were, of heaven, should by some mysterious law deepen and darken the surrounding and encompassing shadow ? It looks as if the tasted blessings of the people of God exasperate and irritate the hearts and passions of them that hate it. There are sunless lairs in the depths of this great city, amidst its shining sanctuaries and its gorgeous palaces, that are not equalled in heathendom itself. By some mysterious law it seems that wherever the gospel is as a life, there, in the absence of it, seems to live a death the more terrible. When God's gifts are rejected and cast upon the ground, they are turned into stumbling-blocks, on which man falls, and is broken to pieces.

They who have heard the truths of the Bible from *their earliest years*, who have become acquainted with

them in their riper days, and who subsequently, in spite of early teaching, tread down its grand lights, march over its prostrate warnings, become the most depraved, and the most degraded of all. Their first resistance to that book which they have been early taught, is most overwhelming and agonizing; but when they have conquered all its piercing protests, and silenced all its warnings, their victory is most terrible. But even they cannot extinguish it; their memories in childhood were receptive as wax, and in maturer years they have become retentive as iron of what they then received. And as often as they begin to sin, or plunge into wickedness, or give full scope to their passions, texts they were taught in the nursery, in the school, in the family, in the sanctuary, assert for themselves the space that is their due, and rise up amid the fierce democracy of depraved passions, like Paul's voice amid his infuriated persecutors, reasoning of righteousness, and temperance, and judgment; and protest that their desecration will one day be surely and terribly avenged. It is the once enlightened professor that becomes the most terrible apostate. When an angel falls, he does not stop in his descent till he becomes a fiend; it is the professor that once knew and loved the truth, and frequently heard it, and now treads out its very last spark, and determines to have done with it for ever—not that he can disprove it, but that he wants swing for his passions without any remonstrating voice to interrupt him,—who becomes a Paine, a Voltaire, a Hume, or one of those withering spirits that spread gloom, and desolation, and a curse, and misery, upon all that come within their reach. *It is to such that the solemn words of the apostle*

apply, "If he who despised Moses' law died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing?" "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." And so Peter warns them, "For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." They who know the gospel, who were early initiated in it, who once felt something of its force, who were sustained and comforted by its lessons; who, nevertheless, because they want to get rid of a protesting voice that warns against sin, plunge again into wickedness; reach a descent so deep, and an aberration so distant, that, though nothing is impossible with God, they are least likely to return to the paths of righteousness and peace from which they have wandered. In the Bible you have indeed the bright beams of the everlasting sunshine, and also the possibilities of a terrible and an unending curse: there is no such solemn possession upon earth as a Bible, there is no one thing that involves so tremendous responsibilities; let us then, who know it and who love it, study it and value it more; and as long as we can say our souls thirst for *the knowledge of it*, it is precious as gold, it is sweeter

than honey. If we can only feel deeply in reference to the past, that we have sinned, and desire in reference to the future that our sin may be forgiven,—that our minds may value more the blessings that are so precious, responsibilities that are so weighty,—then God hath not forgotten us, nor forsaken us: we are on the verge and bound-line of that new progression, which, by grace, will culminate in everlasting glory.

There is an institution, next to the Bible, probably the most precious that we have on earth—the Christian Sabbath. What is this day? It is the sacred enclosure, in the silence of which the words of God ring from heaven to earth like sweetest music; it is that day on which the air of heaven seems to lie softest and sweetest upon the bosom of earth; it is that holy and favoured day on which the house of God stands out from the shops and the warehouses, in sharper and more brilliant relief; and the sun seems to shine down as if he had received a new commission to begin afresh his journey. To the church of Christ that Sabbath is the dearest day, the princess of the seven; to society the Sabbath is the green and shaded path, dotted over with flowers, and abounding in sequestered nooks, into which poor weary humanity can retreat from the dusty roads, and the turmoil, and the crowded squares, and the miserable alleys, and find refreshment and rest, and recover heart again for the journey and the duties of the week. But to the Christian it is more than all this: it is the parting of the clouds, that the sunbeams of heaven may shine through; it is the silence on the earth for a little space, that God may be heard speaking to him; it is *the green lawn that stretches before the courts of the*

new Jerusalem, the portico of his Father's house, and the many mansions that there await the just. But because this day is so dear,—because as a possession so precious,—strange but true, it may be made, and may degenerate, into a terrible curse. Who is the man that goes farthest from morality upon the Sabbath day? Not he who never held it sacred, who has no faith in its divine mission: he who breaks forth into the greatest sins, and plunges into the worst immoralities upon that day, cannot but believe it sacred—believes in the fourth commandment; but under temptation is driven to break through its limits and restraints,—and having burst through, like a flood long dammed up, his life becomes devastating and destructive in its career. I venture to assert, on the continent of Europe, and even in Paris itself, there is not so much of immorality on the Sabbath day, as there is in England, in Scotland,—in London, and in Glasgow. I will tell you why. The people in Paris—most wrongly I admit—do not regard the day as sacred,—they look upon it not as a holy day, which is our conviction, and the true conviction; but, as a holiday: and the consequence is, when Frenchmen go out to the different fields and parks, they go and spend it in what we should call, on week-days, innocent amusements. But when an Englishman or a Scotchman, early accustomed to true religion, breaks through the restraints of the Sabbath, he does not spend it as a Frenchman does; he seems, having got rid of what was the great obstruction to profligacy and wickedness, to plunge into a course of moral aberration and depravity, that is not equalled nor approached on the continent of Europe. *The desecration of a sacred thing leads to far more*

terrible and disastrous issues than the utter ignorance of its sacredness. If you want thoroughly to corrupt society, you must destroy its Sabbaths. The young man whose career becomes the most calamitous generally admits he began on the Sabbath day. When one who has been taught its sacredness, initiated in its solemn claims, once breaks loose and bursts through its restraints, and repels "Thou shalt not," no foresight of ours can calculate the issue. Better that he had been born in Paris, and never believed the Sabbath to be any more than a saint's day, and been merry and enjoyed himself, than born in London, or in Edinburgh, or in Glasgow, there early impressed with its solemnity, to break through it, and eventually to indulge in all the depravity and wickedness which lurk in the lairs and dark places of the great capitals of Europe.

Thus, I have tried to show, that whether we look to God, or to the Bible, or to the Sabbath, or to the gospel, in each is treasured up a glorious blessing; but side by side, in the bosom of each, there is the possibility, in the case of our perversion, of a gigantic and fatal curse.

I might now enter on providential things, and show you that this law applies to afflictions and to prosperity, as gifts of God. Take, for instance, afflictions. These come to all; but either as blessings, or as judgments, according to what you are, and what you believe and feel. An affliction comes to you as a paternal chastisement of one of God's sons, or as a penal judgment inflicted upon one of God's enemies. Two persons are equally visited, equally afflicted; in the one *case it is but chastisement* that, like the April

shower, softens the heart's soil preparatory to the everlasting summer; in the other case, it is penalty, hardening the heart till it becomes as the very granite itself. Most true it is, as the apostle says, "Through much tribulation you may enter the kingdom of God;" but it is no less true, that through much tribulation you may be drawn into deeper and more distant apostasy from God. Most true it is, that sorrow has turned many a heart into stone, by being misinterpreted and misreceived; while, on the other hand, it is no less true, that sorrow has turned many a stony heart into a heart of flesh, by being rightly received and sanctified. The weeping eye that looks upwards while it weeps, sees the shining path of glory, and draws along it, and down it, deep consolation; the weeping eye that looks downwards, sees only deepening gulfs of despair, the longer that it looks. In other words affliction is a cloud charged with judgments, or charged with blessings, according to what the man is who receives them from the hand of God. So, again, in reference to prosperity: we are all apt to think that health is a blessing, wealth a blessing, and riches and honours blessings. They may be so, but they are not necessarily so. Do you think there are no men on a death-bed who curse the day, from the bottom of their hearts, when God suffered them to be rich?—no men that have not then and there cursed God because they were lifted to honour, pre-eminence, and power? And, on the other hand, are there no men that bless God with their last breath that they were hungry, and hardly fed, and often had great difficulties to contend with in order to find *to-morrow's* meal? But we are so vulgar in our taste,

so blind in our apprehensions, that we think wealth is necessarily happiness, and prosperity sunshine; and that the good things of this world, as they are called, are necessarily great blessings. Many a heart is happier in a little cottage with a quarter of an acre for a potato-field around it, than hearts that throb in palaces, and have the acclamations and the wealth of the wide world subservient. It is within that happiness lives; never shall we be happy till we learn this lesson. Poor man runs and appeals for happiness to every quarter upon earth, a miserable beggar. He says to money, "Oh! do make me happy." Failing here, he goes to rank, and says, "Do give me happiness;" and, failing again, he flies to literature, and cries, "Do fill the vacancy of my heart, and make me happy." What is the universal experience,—from Solomon down to Napoleon III. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." These are broken cisterns; they can hold no water. Blessed be God it is so: it is the evidence of man's fall, that he goes to any creature and seeks happiness from it; but it is the evidence of his grandeur, that no creature upon earth can satisfy him. His soul was made to be the shrine of deity; and until he get his heart right, his affections tuned, his soul renewed, and taste peace with God, he will never know what happiness is. The man who stands right in his relationship to God,—who can look at God's law, and not be blinded by its lightnings; who can hear Sinai's thunders, and not quail beneath their noise; who can look into the grave and say, "I must lie down there, and tell the worm, thou art my sister, and corruption, my mother;" but can add, "*this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruptible,*

incorruptibility ; and death shall be swallowed up in victory ;" who can look to God and say, " He is the judge of all, but he is my father ; he is the consuming fire, but he is also love ;"—such a man can look to the future and say, " Eternity is the length of my coming life ; infinitude is the width of my everlasting home ;" he has within him a spark that shall be never quenched—a life that shall never die—the very sunshine of heaven already in his faint rising, that shall kindle into all the splendours of everlasting day ; when the past shall be unsighed for, and the present shall be all sure, and the future shall be all blessing ; and God, our God, shall be all and in all.

THE ARK AND JUDGMENTS.

CHAPTER VI.

PHILISTINES DESIROUS OF BEING RID OF THE ARK. THEY CONSULT THE MAGICIANS AND SOOTHSAYERS. THEIR ABSURD PRESCRIPTION. THE MEN OF BETH-SHEMESH SMITTEN.

THE last chapter informed us that the ark of the Lord, carried into the field of battle as an idol and object of trust by the children of Israel, was taken captive by the Philistines, and remained in the midst of them; the God of whom it was the symbol inflicting on its spoilers great judgments for their sins and transgressions against him; and we learned the very important lesson that to make an idol even of a divine truth or thing, is as sinful on the one hand as to despise and disregard that truth on the other hand. The ark was the symbol of God's presence; it was to Israel what a sacrament is to us. The party that had it as their privilege forgot God, and thought the symbol of his presence had all the virtue that belongs to God only: the other party, that made captive the ark, treated it with contempt, and would not believe that it was the sacred symbol of a present, a propitious, and a holy God. The consequence was that judgments fell upon Israel in the death of Hophni and Phinehas, in the *death of the wife of one of them*, in the death of Eli,

the aged priest; all of whom were pre-eminently and personally guilty: they fell also upon the Philistines, who had taken it as spoil, in succession, because of their contempt and disregard of it; and now in this chapter we have an account of their anxiety to get rid of what they believed to be the cause of all their sufferings; the true cause being not the ark in the midst of them, but their contempt of it, disregard of God, and disobedience to his holy and his revealed will. They therefore asked, not, What shall we do with our sins? or rather, Shall we renounce them? but, What shall we do to get rid of the ark? foolishly and wrongly attributing to it the judgments which were really the just retributions for their own great transgressions. They consulted not God's word, as far as it was accessible; but, in ignorance, their own diviners and magicians; and these gave their opinion—an opinion based upon the practice indulged in with reference to the heathen gods—"You are not to send away the ark empty; you are to return a trespass offering; you are to turn your judgments into symbols and images which you are to dedicate to this God,"—for they regarded Jehovah as one of the gods,—“and then you will see that he will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land.” They also ordered them to take a new cart, and two milch kine, on which there had come no yoke, who therefore might be expected not to move equably together, and to take their calves home, that there might be the greater temptation for them to return; and, if they should see that, instead of returning to their home, they went straight on until they arrived at Bethshemesh, then they might *be assured that* God had done this great evil, and that

he was at last removing it, with the procession of the ark to its own land. But, on the other hand, if the kine returned home to their borders, or if they did not move on equably together, these diviners stupidly, and ignorantly, and absurdly prophesied, "Then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us; and we have no help but patiently to bear and get rid of it in the best way that we can."

The ark was removed; the kine took the straight way to Bethshemesh, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand nor to the left; and the Philistines therefore argued that God had inflicted the judgments because they kept the ark; whereas he had inflicted the judgments because they desecrated it, and indulged in sin; and now that the ark, to which they attributed these judgments, was removed into another city, they expected that the tide of judgment would ebb away, and the land bask again in the sunshine of God's favour, in prosperity and in peace.

When the ark came up to the city of Bethshemesh, which means "the house of the sun," they clave the wood of the cart on which it was borne, and offered the kine that dragged it a burnt-offering to Jehovah, the true God. After the five lords of the Philistines had returned, God smote the men of Bethshemesh, and for this reason,—that they had looked into the ark of the Lord. This ark, I need scarcely remind you, was the holy chest that stood between the cherubim in the holy of holies, on which was the lid of gold, and on which golden lid there was an *intensely bright* sunshine, *intenser than the sun-*

shine of noonday ; and into this holy place the high priest only went once a year : all of these, as I have taught you before, significant of great evangelical truths, which it is not necessary now to explain. These Bethshemites knew that by looking into this holy ark they would be guilty of sin ; they must have known that such conduct was most criminal, that a strict interdict forbade it ; and that looking into it was therefore an act of direct rebellion against the revealed will and known law of God. God therefore, it is said, smote them with a great slaughter. But probably, in our translation, “ fifty thousand and three score and ten men ” is not rightly rendered ; on this ground,—that it was a small village, a very small place, probably not nearly so populous : and it is most likely, therefore, that we have mistranslated what really literally translated is, “ And the Lord smote of the people three score and ten, fifties, and a thousand ; ” that is the literal translation. Three score and ten is seventy ; fifties is double, making one hundred,—one hundred and seventy ; and add to that a thousand, and you have one thousand one hundred and seventy people. There is no doubt that this is the correct translation. Then the men of Bethshemesh, under these severe judgments, exclaimed, “ Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God ? ” and the best sign in the language they employed was that they regarded these judgments as coming down, not from an omnipotent, but from a holy Lord God.

THE COUNSEL OF SAMUEL.

CHAPTER VII.

APPEAL TO SAMUEL. HIS COUNSEL. TEMPORAL AND ETERNAL DUTIES. RELIGION REASONABLE. PRACTICAL. THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES. FASTING. CONFESSION. ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS.

IN the beginning, and according to the order of the narrative which we have pursued, we hear that the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim for about twenty years; the Philistines apparently in the ascendant, and the children of Israel depressed, afflicted, and sorrowing for forfeited privileges that did not seem likely soon to return. They appealed to Samuel, one of their judges—a class of men, as I explained before, who were partly dictators, partly generals to lead the army in the field, and partly judges to settle disputes between man and man; and in all instances, at least in most instances, experienced, practical, godly, and Christian men. They appealed to Samuel upon this occasion; and Samuel told them there was but one course to pursue if they would obtain a victory in the field, or see restored their forfeited privileges at home; therefore he says to them, “If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts.” Here is the first duty, to return to God with all the heart. Too many still *come to God with part of their hearts, leaving part of*

it mortgaged to Mammon, part of it locked up in the counting-house; part of it employed, busy, bustling at home; but is it uncharitable to say that few, comparatively at least, bring all their heart into the sunshine of the countenance of God, and consecrate and sanctify it wholly to the service of God, the living God? We do not mean that when we give all the heart to the Lord, we should take no interest in other things. We must not neglect our temporal duties under the pretence that we have eternal ones; we must not be undutiful to a master upon earth on the hypocritical pretext that we must serve God, our Lord and master in heaven; but by a law that is always applicable, he whose heart and treasure are most in heaven, will at the same time be most busy, most dutiful, and I venture to assert most successful in all the employments and the avocations of this world. How reasonable is religion. You hear people say, "We cannot do what God demands of us." What does he demand? Never in a single instance more than what is duty. He does not say, "Thou shalt love me more than thou canst;" but he says, "Love me with *all* thy heart, and with *all* thy soul, and with *all* thy strength." He does not ask an angel-worship from a human heart; but he asks the consecration of a human heart in all its resources, sympathies, affections, to the love and service of Him whose love is sweeter than law, and whose service is perfect freedom. The first thing therefore God asks of us is the heart; and what follows that? The hand, the foot, the tongue, the affections, all must obey. And the heart being given, "*Ye must put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among*

you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only : and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." Here is the practical duty that follows from the consecration of the heart. It is when conflict comes that you can determine whose your heart is, and to whom it has been given. If the love of wealth, of honour, of power, of ambition, or passion of any sort, seize the heart, and make you dedicate your services to these, and for these give up the allegiance that you owe to God, then you cannot have given all your heart to God—you cannot have consecrated all your affections to him ; for as sure as the heart is righted in its polarity, so sure, hand, and foot, and eye, and tongue, and ear, will all be adjusted in beautiful and obedient proportion. But there must first be the inner man, then there must be the outer service. In other words it is, " Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness ; and all other things will be added unto you."

They gathered together, and poured out water—celebrating evidently the feast of tabernacles, at which Christ preached, as recorded in the Gospel of St. John, when he said, " If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink." They fasted ; fasting employed here not merely in the sense—the common sense and the lowest sense—of abstinence from food, but abstinence from evil temper, from controversy, disputes, labour, and employment in the world ; in other words, a whole consecration to the service of God. And they said, confessing their manifold sins, " We have sinned against the Lord ;" that was their confession. " And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh." *Nothing could be shorter than this confession, nothing*

could be fuller. It was the submission of the heart, the acknowledgment of guilt, the supplication for pardon and for mercy. No sooner had they thus prayed and Samuel sacrificed—offered up a prefigurative sacrifice, prefigurative of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the great central sacrifice in the universe—and offered up prayers for them, than God heard, notwithstanding all their past delinquencies, their aggravated sins, their ceaseless rebellion; worse as they were than they thought themselves, yet no sooner did this stiff-necked, sinful, rebellious race return to the Lord with all their heart, and own their sin, and seek forgiveness, than God showed himself then what he shows himself now, full of compassion, merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. When the Philistines came against them to battle, they were beaten; God thundered against them, and Israel prevailed. Why should temporal success in a good cause not follow the banners of them that seek the presence and the blessing of God? I do not see anything obsolete and theocratic in this; on the contrary, I see in it principles of universal application, in all circumstances, under all conditions. And perhaps we may learn, what nations have learned long since, a theocracy ceased to be the prerogative and the possession of any one nation in particular; that our victories are gained, our blessings are perpetuated, our peace is secured, “not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” We may be sure of this,—let a nation do what is right in the sight of God, and all that heart can desire will follow in its wake; but let nations do what is sinful, *criminal, unholy* in his sight, and unjust towards

others, and we can expect no blessing, as we do not deserve it.

Then Samuel raised a stone of acknowledgment—
“Hitherto the Lord hath helped us :” and the Philistines were subdued ; they came no more into the coasts of Israel, and Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

EBENEZER.

“Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.”—1 SAMUEL vii. 12.

ST. PAUL tells us in his Epistle to the Romans, that “whatsoever things were written aforetime,”—that is, relating to the records in the Old Testament Scriptures, —“were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” This explains the interest and value of the Old Testament Scriptures. There are persons who believe that the New Testament is complete without the Old ; or at least, that the New has wholly superseded the Old. There cannot be a greater mistake ; the New Testament is incomplete without the Old, which is its complement ; and the readers of the New would find themselves often puzzled and perplexed by the simplest allusions, unless they were masters of the leading events, facts, and institutions of the Old Testament Scriptures. The truth is, the most beautiful thoughts in that great and sublime theocracy, had relation and reference constantly to us. Is it not pleasing to think that Moses wrote not for Israel, but *for the people of England also* ; that the Psalms of

David have their echoes and reverberations in the hearts of the inhabitants of all Christian lands; that the prophecies of Isaiah are writing themselves every day in the chapters of history, in the annals of the nations of the remotest corners of the world; and that those words of comfort, and of hope, and of joy, so often recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures, are not empty cups, but full, refreshing many hearts and cheering spirits that are discouraged; so that not a babe upon its mother's knee is not better, and happier, and more hopeful, because David sung and Isaiah prophesied, and Moses wrote? There is another aspect of the interest of the Old Testament Scripture toward us. The Old Testament Scripture, with its peculiar institutions, was meant for the infancy of the Christian Church. It is quite plain that the Christian Church has had its infancy; if even it has now arrived at its manhood, it has not yet reached, I believe, its full maturity and perfection. In the Old Testament Scripture there are rites, and ceremonies, and institutions, which seem to us almost puerile, but which had then their value, their unspeakable importance. While to the maturest mind, the most illuminated and experienced intellect, many of the institutions of the Old Testament economy seem childish, or rather, as it should be called, child-like,—for things that are child-like are not always childish,—they must not forget that there are Christians still who, individually, are in the same infancy in which the Church of Israel was as a body; and that those abstract truths grasped and appreciated by the master intellects of the few, cannot be understood by great multitudes, *unless they are clothed in beautiful symbols,*

in expressive types, and brought as it were within the horizon of their minds, and subject to the cognizance of the outward senses. Now those that cannot receive a truth in its abstract purity, can receive, and enjoy, and appreciate that truth under some beautiful symbol. The serpent of brass, the city of refuge, the morning and the evening sacrifice, the priestly office of Aaron, are some of the symbols from which, as from a mirror, it is reflected; and in which abstract truth assumes the proportions, and sets itself forth in the lights of human sympathy and experience. We can see, therefore, that there is a use, a living and actual use, in the Old Testament, apart from its relation to an infant church,—that there are infant Christians now just as there was an infant church then; and that to these infant Christians this Old Testament Scripture may convey many precious and important truths, and enable them to comprehend great doctrines, rich in inexhaustible comfort, which otherwise they would not so fully understand.

We have here, in the verse prefixed, a lasting memorial, a memorial set up in the midst of the land, to commemorate, or make more real, vivid, and comprehensible, a great act of mercy and of loving-kindness on the part of God. It may be said by some, Could they ever forget so signal an interposition, that they should require a monument visible and material to commemorate it? God knew best. In the same way it is asked, What is the use of the Lord's Supper as a standing memorial? Can we ever forget that unprecedented love, that unparalleled sacrifice? God knew best; and because he saw, what we ourselves feel, that outward monuments, visible memo-

rials, are not simply the mementoes of the past, but also vivid appeals to the deepest sentiments of the present, there was an Eben-ezer raised on the spot where Israel had triumphed; and there is a memorial perpetuated in the church, of that love that had no precedent, and never can have any parallel. The meaning of the word Ebenezer is, literally translated, "The stone of help." The thought it is intended to convey is that God alone is the help of his people; and that his people, without him in all ages and under all circumstances, are weak. Is it then true that we are weak? Is it true that we need a ceaseless supply of superhuman strength to carry us through this world, and to conduct us to that brighter and better rest that remains for the people of God? In Paradise Adam's strength was in God; we have been banished from it, placed in the desert, blind, and needing light; weak, and needing strength; poor, and needing to be made unsearchably rich: and unless God be our Ebenezer, and at every moment and in every place, we must perish by the way; but if he be our strength made perfect in weakness, then, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, we shall not be afraid, for God is our refuge and our strength. How often do we need in life's road a light to shine upon us, to show us where it leads? How often in our experience in this world, to use the ordinary expression, are we at our wits' end, and long for some ray to shine from the Source of light to teach us where we are to move, what we are to do, and how we can be delivered? How often do we long, in the silence and secrecy of bewilderment,—of which *every one has been more or less conscious*,—for

some sweet voice, like the voice of our Father,—that voice that has in it a depth indicating it has been steeped in the warmth of a loving heart,—to break upon our souls, and to say only those short, but sufficient words, “My son, my daughter, my child, this is the way, walk ye in it?” And if it be true that that voice has often sounded in our hearts, that a light unexpected has frequently shone upon the road, that mysterious impulses we could not explain, though we could most thankfully feel, have taught us what to do, and where to go,—each spot where we felt this, each nook where we were at our wits’ end, and were helped, each winding and eddy in the current of life, is a place where a Christian heart in its thankfulness will rear its shining Ebenezer; and not say, but sing, “Here and hitherto the Lord hath helped me.”

Not only is this the experience of the individual Christian, but also the peculiar and distinguishing characteristic of what may be called true Christian history. Open the page of the most gifted historian in the world—read his narrative; you are charmed with bright sentiment, you are struck with brilliant antithesis, you can see events linked together, and the solution of their action explained, on human principles and after human judgment. But in all the beautiful web there is no golden thread running through indicating the origin in God, and the issues and the glory there also: it is merely secular and human history. But open a divine history; open such a history as D’Aubigné’s, and you will find that he holds it to be the dominant principle of history, that we take as our guiding star the pregnant truth, “*GOD IS IN HISTORY.*”

To write history, excluding God, is to mistake facts, and mistrace phenomena; to write history, ever recognising God, is to write it truly, justly, and as all true history ever should be written; for we never can read it without seeing what a poet, even one of ourselves, has expressed, that—

“There is a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them as we will;”

or what an inspired penman has said, of which the human poet's language is but a copy:—“The heart of man deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.” Exclude these dominant thoughts, and history is a labyrinth; admit them, and the thread is revealed in the labyrinth that will guide your feet to bright and glorious day.

Instead, however, of looking at history at large, let me ask the humblest and obscurest individual, who has felt the fewest of the ups and downs of human life,—whose biography has in the past, whether brief or protracted, been the least chequered of all,—whose history has been extremely plain, straightforward, and very easily translated at this moment,—let me ask that individual, as the most favourable person I can possibly quote, to sit down; exclude in your retrospect of the past all the phantoms of the present; shut out the din of the world's ceaselessly revolving wheels; take a retrospect of your early days; recall any one sketch that you once drew, or painted, or wrote, of what you meant to do, what you designed to be, and what you were determined to arrive at. Take this sketch that you then drew; if you are now *forty years old*, take the sketch that you drew and

painted at twenty or at twenty-five, which you were determined to make actual and real in your subsequent experience; retouch every colour, correct as far as you can where time has effaced; and having thus retouched, and repainted, and illuminated the sketch of what you purposed to be twenty years ago, re-tread the path that you have pursued during the last twenty years; compare the steps you have taken with those you designed to take; compare the path you are treading, and have trodden, with the plan that you laid down upon this chart, and by which you meant to steer through life's voyage till you reached its peaceful haven; and what is your experience? Scarcely is there one point of coincidence or contact. You find that what you purposed to make actual you have not even touched; that you are at this moment where you never meant to be, not where you had resolved to be. Now, how do you account for this? Do you mean to say that your life at this moment is the creation of accidents, the mere result of fortuitous occurrences? Here occurred an interposition that altered the whole current of your thoughts, and changed their channel, and carried you where you never meant to be; there a cloud overspread a sky, the ceaseless brilliancy of which you had assumed as an absolute and immovable fixture; here, again, a bereavement occurred, that broke up the homestead you assumed to be perpetual; there some passion made you diverge, some prejudice prevented a step you ought to have taken, some word was rashly spoken which is echoing against every part of the world around you, some deed rashly done *that has left its traces ineradicably behind.* Between

complete destruction and prosperous speed are only the few inches called the switch on a railway: so when you were on the very verge of ruin, an impulse that came you knew not whence nor how, touched you, and sent you on beyond the reach of peril, and with prosperous and increasing speed. Who was this that turned you, that met you, that saved you even from yourself, when self would have been ruin? Who was this that crossed long-cherished purposes, broke up brilliant and delightful dreams, altered the whole current of your life, and made you at this moment, whatever that may be, what you never contemplated, the result not of your own exertions, but in spite of your most earnest purposes, your most deliberate and powerful attempts? It is God. Where that darling purpose was crossed, it is yours to erect your Ebenezer; where that sweet dream was disturbed, as by a peal of thunder, you should erect your Ebenezer; where you were crossed, and thwarted, and chagrined beyond all bearing, thinking that all things were against you, you now discover that it was not chance, nor an enemy, but God, your Father, interposing for your happiness. At every turning of the road, at every sunset upon the scene of life, at every beat of your heart, at every incident of your career, there is suggested what it is duty to erect a memorial of,—“Hitherto the Lord hath helped me.”

Review, or rather think again, upon the bearing of events upon your spiritual state, and see if the same great truth does not come out. We find, as Christians, that our Christian character was contingent upon the most *minute* and microscopic incidents. *But what is Christian character?* It is the lifting of

a man from a state of condemnation to a state of hope, of happiness, of joy,—from ruin to a state of eternal blessedness. Can I suppose for a moment that it was something that God did not see, or did not care for, did not commission, or did not control, which has been made the turning-point of my everlasting condition throughout ages to come? If there be God acting in the universe, it is surely, surely at that point in the current of an individual life which determines whether that current shall flow into a sea of illuminated blessedness and peace, or into that moaning sea from which all hope has withering fled, and all mercy has sighed farewell. In the case of Paul, you see the lightning strike, and you feel God is there; in the case of Luther, startled in a moment, and turned from darkness unto light, you can almost see the divine hand touching him; in the case of John Newton, holding the helm of a slave-ship in a tempestuous sea, a text suddenly illuminated, and made quick and powerful in his conscience, you can see the very presence, you can almost hear the very words of God himself. But in your case, though the miracle be less visible, it is not less real. It needed as much grace to make you a saint as to make Paul, or Luther, or John Newton; and there is as real a presence of Deity in the change of the Sunday-school child's heart as in the creation of an orb, in the birth of an archangel, or in the greatest feat that Omnipotence performs. If so, are we not called upon, not only in providential experience, but also in our Christian retrospect, to seize that random incident, as we supposed at the *time*—that unlucky, cross dispensation, as we thought *at the moment*, which carried us within sound of the

glorious gospel, which opened our hearts to receive truths they had been shut to before, which became in our experience, and what we feel at this moment to have been in our experience, the point where we ceased to recede from God, and began to approach him, and to call him Father, and to find in his presence peace, and through his word the hopes of glory? Ought we not in the retrospect to raise at that point our shining Ebenezer, and to write upon it, never to be cancelled in our recollections, "Here, here, at this very spot, the Lord hath holpen me?" Have you not found that what you thought was the evidence of a God not hearing prayer, has become in your retrospect and experience the evidence of a God answering prayer? How often do I hear individuals deeply impressed say, "We pray, but we do not receive an answer to our prayers." You do receive an answer. You may lay it down as an absolute fact, that no man ever asked in the name of Christ a real blessing who did not get it. "But," you say, "we have no evidence of it." Quite true; we walk, believing God, who says so, by faith—not always feeling or walking by sight. The blessing comes, but not always in the formula or shape that you in your ignorance chalked out—not at the time and under the circumstances where you in your ignorance attempted to dictate to God, but in a shape not worse, but better—not less opportune, but more so. The blessing that you have sought from the heart descends in due time, and the clouds that you think charged with wrath, and lightnings, and thunders, are found to have been charged with benedictions, that *burst upon your head: the cross wind that strikes you,*

and that you think is driving you to the depths of ruin, is wafting you nearer and nearer to a blessed haven.

We have thus looked at our Ebenezer raised at every chapter in providential history, and raised amid all the fugitive phases and experiences of the Christian life. Let me anticipate that blessed day when the orb on which we live shall be all magnificence—the shining Ebenezer amid the orbs of the universe. When that future comes, which will be alike the explanation and the coronation of the perplexed and mysterious present, those afflictions which God's people felt—those trials with which they wrestled in many a dark and melancholy hour—those unanswered prayers, as they thought—those inequalities of Providence which they could not explain—those unsounded abysses of anguish which they could not fathom—those tears which were alike the symbols and the relief of the deep sorrow of the heart—will be found not to have been hostile blows, unanswered prayers, penal inflictions and visitations dealt by the hand of an offended and an avenging Judge, but the signatures of heaven—the badges of the children of God—mighty impulses that had their issue and their culmination amid the splendours and the glories of eternal day. On that day, and on the margin of the better land, the Christian will thank God for his losses more than for his gains—for his bereavements more than for his blessings, and will say over many a dark nook, over many a solitary spot, over many a gloomy sepulchre, over many a melancholy hour, “My Father was in this place, and I knew it not; here the Lord helped me; Ebenezer I will erect to his praise. Hitherto also the Lord *hath holpen me.*”

And when you come, as all must come, to that hour when the soul, disentangled from its earthly tenement, shall wend its speedy way to the presence of God and of the Lamb—when from the last bed you review all the way—you will then see, because set in more brilliant light, that God was here, that his finger touched you there, that it was his word, not chance, that spoke to you elsewhere; and instead of viewing your biography as a thing of incidents, and accidents, and lucky changes, and unlucky occurrences, you will see your life—the poorest the blankest, the obscurest—to be made up of ceaseless miracles, and that not figuratively, but literally. “In God we live, and move, and have our being.” We see God in the life that now is, recognising, seeing, and praising him while we say, “Hitherto the Lord has helped me.” We shall see him in that better life where there is no sunset, and no shadow, which is in itself one bright and brilliant memorial of mercies without number, and blessings without ceasing.

How are we to raise this Ebenezer? We have no Mizpeh and Shen, the seat of great victory or of great deliverance, in which to raise a monumental column, and write upon it, “Ebenezer, hitherto the Lord hath helped us.” If you are conscious as individuals that God has been in your individual history,—if you feel in the retrospect of the past that God has been giving you impulses and directions at every perplexed moment in your past life,—yours it is to erect an Ebenezer to express gratitude, and to commemorate God’s great goodness. Its first seat must be the Christian’s own individual heart: in it religion has its *birth and consecration*; in its depths real religion

has its roots, its springs, and its continuous life. If you feel, "God has blessed me,"—if you feel, "God has been with me,"—if you feel that, "Here, there, at every point, I have been guided, directed, prospered, blessed, by one whose eye sleepeth not, and slumbereth not,"—then the first spot in which your Ebenezer will be raised will be the depths of a holy, worshipping, sanctified, loving heart. The poor widow that had but two mites to cast into the treasury cast in the noblest offering, not because in weight they were greatest or in value most precious, but because she had carried them in upon the warm currents of her own loving and thankful heart. And she who had nothing to give the Saviour but tears and kisses for his sacred feet, gave him infinitely more than the Pharisee, that gave long prayers, and dignified outward recognition, and nothing more. One pennyworth of love in the heart is worth thousands of shekels of gold and silver in the outward life. Religion has its birth and its greatest triumphs in the heart; for where in the individual true religion overcomes deep passion, roots out inveterate prejudice, and makes the heart beat in unison with the mind of him from whose touch its every pulse ceaselessly comes, there is a victory, in comparison of which the victories of great nations are not worthy to be mentioned. The heart is the first, the deepest, the lasting seat of true religion. That tear which the woman wept upon the Saviour's feet, that mite which the widow cast into the treasury, were more resplendent than monumental columns, golden shrines, glorious commemorative pillars, or all that a nation's wealth can raise to commemorate great goodness and heroic deeds.

Whilst it is true that your Ebenezer is first to be in the heart, whilst a deep sense of thankfulness to God, the result of a thorough appreciation of his guiding hand in all the past eventualities of life, is the first thing, it is not to be the only thing: it is no less dutiful to erect your Ebenezer externally than internally. It is as wrong to make heart-religion an excuse for doing and giving nothing, as it is to make doing and giving an excuse for heart-religion; because anything may express the gratitude you feel, it does not follow that nothing is to express it. In other words, wherever, and in the case of whomsoever there is felt this gratitude for God's interposing hand that you have seen and felt in the retrospect I have referred to, there will not only be this gratitude in the heart, but it will overflow in the life; the warmth within will make itself felt without; the perfume in the casket will spread its aroma around it; the life in the heart will show itself in the actions by the hand. But, you ask, what Ebenezer can I erect? Everybody is not to erect one and the same; one man has what another has not. Grace invites you to erect the Ebenezer in the heart; every man can do that: but Providence determines what shall be the expression of it in the outward life. One man has time, for instance; that time spent in teaching the ignorant, in reclaiming the vicious, in circulating the Bible, in giving an instructive tract, in recommending a useful book, is his Ebenezer. Another man has money in his hand; that money is to be spent, or at least a portion of it, in acts of beneficence and goodness, to express outwardly the gratitude that you feel inwardly. Are there not schools demanded in one place? *These will be your shining Ebenezers*

in the sight of heaven. Are there not teachers to be endowed in another place? There may be your Ebenezers, expressive of your gratitude to God. Are there not the poor and naked to be clothed, the hungry to be fed? You need not go across the ocean in order to do good; between the rich that have more than they can use, and the poor that have nothing, there is not a broad sea to be crossed, there is only a brick wall—that is all. If you have in your heart the inspiration of gratitude to God for what he has done for you, who have done so little for yourselves, and if you wish to unfold and embody that gratitude and love in the most lasting and expressive memorials, it does not need much ingenuity, or very great search, to find channels, exponents, and expressions. Look behind the splendid palace, whose shadow falls upon the terrible dens of the poor, the forsaken, and the destitute; look into the mazes of this great city: are there no channels, no opportunities, no means? Take care lest your non-apprehension of means of usefulness be simply an ingenious but wicked apology for want of love to God, or sympathy with mankind. If you have this gratitude to God in your heart, if you have no time that is not absorbed in earning your bread, no means to spare after providing for yourselves, your children, and those dependent upon you, you have still, poor, needy, destitute as you are, places where you may erect a brilliant and resplendent Ebenezer, or memorial stone; for of all expressions of gratitude and love, the most eloquent, the most beautiful, the most impressive, is that temple which the Holy Ghost dwells in. The living temple is that epistle which the Holy Ghost *writes*; the living epistle is that patience and suffer-

ing, that meekness when wronged, that fortitude in trial, that sympathy with want, that kind word when you have nothing to bestow, that sympathising look when you have no means of giving where you would ; that is the just and beautiful expression in your life of your thankfulness to God. If you cannot be a star in the sky, you can at least be a taper upon earth ; if you cannot be the light that illuminates the wide world by its splendour, you may at least be the salt that quiet, unseen, and unfelt, keeps it from corruption ; if you cannot shine on a lofty hill, you need not put your light under a bushel. Depend upon it, when there is a heart touched by the retrospect I have referred to, a heart that has seen, and felt, and recognised God in every nook and turning of its daily history, there will be love and gratitude within ; and, if means, there will be expressions in sacrifices and liberality without ; and if there be no means at all, there will be that eloquent sermon, that sculpture more beautiful than the noblest creations of the chisel—the eloquence of a quiet, holy, consistent, loving life, which is the creation of life from God in the heart within.

You are to seek help from God in prayer for the future as in the past. When you take a retrospect of the past, see how God stepped in at unexpected crises, when you had no hope, and scarcely any trust. If this be your experience in the past, let us look into the future, and feel that the same God who so unexpectedly delivered here, so signally saved me from destruction there, who so mercifully kept my eyes from tears, my feet from falling, and my soul from death elsewhere—that God is *not weary, that God does not repent*. Look into

the unsounded future; gaze into the years that are coming; and be as convinced as that there is a God in heaven, that no chance can touch you, no hostile force scathe you, no pining consumption waste, no wave overwhelm, no fire kindle upon you, without not only the permission but the arranging presence of Him who will enable you to say throughout eternity, "That which seemed to mean unmitigated curse had in its bosom a boundless and an unceasing blessing." And if we thus feel, we shall erect Ebenezers in the rest of our life, as we erect them now in the retrospect of the past; and taking to ourselves all the comfort, we will give to Him to whom it is most justly due, all the praise, the glory, and the honour, through Christ Jesus. Amen.

THE RESTLESS DESIRE.

CHAPTER VIII.

DESIRE OF A KING. SAMUEL'S SONS AND THEIR DEPRAVITY.
SAMUEL'S GRIEF. GOD ANSWERS IN JUDGMENT. ISRAEL DIS-
SATISFIED. THEIR RESTLESSNESS. DIFFERENT GOVERNMENTS
ADAPTED TO DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES. WRONG PRAYERS.
NATURE'S RESTLESSNESS. PRAYER.

WE have read of judges selected for a great emergency, and of temporary office, but invested with the power of the Roman Dictator, to rule over and to overcome their enemies, and to make all those arrangements suitable to a new settlement in the midst of the long promised, but still fevered land of Palestine.

It appears that the people grew weary of living under the command of a soldier; weary of successive judges; and they became anxious to have not strictly a king, but rather a tyrant, a despot, invested with absolute power, to reign over them, like the rest of the nations. What could be the objection to such an officer being set over the children of Israel? Had the Israelites been in the same circumstances as we, such an officer might have been appointed without the least dereliction of their obligations to God or their duties to themselves. But they were under a theocracy—*that is, a government in which God personally, by*

signs and voices, spoke and directed them. No ruler, therefore, was to have a permanent succession, or be a permanent ordinance. Their demand of a king was therefore equivalent, in their case, to saying, "We are weary, not of Joshua, nor of the judges of Israel; but of having God so near to us; his presence so felt—his words so audible—his authority so irresistible; and therefore let us get rid of God as the great head of the theocracy, and have an autocracy, or the government of one man invested with absolute and despotic power: not that we like the submission, but that we like the pomp, the splendour, and the circumstance; that thus we may rival or eclipse the surrounding nations."

Samuel had fallen into age and infirmity, and instead of selecting, as he ought to have done, the right men for the right place, he selected his own two sons; guided by nepotism and ties of blood, rather than by a solemn sense of responsibility. Here was the great fault that led, partly I admit, not wholly, to the great catastrophes that followed. He made his sons judges over Israel, without ascertaining if they were fit for so responsible an office: because his sons, therefore, he made them judges over Israel. The sin lay not in making his sons judges over Israel, if they had been fit; but in selecting them, fit or unfit, because they were his sons, for so responsible a position. These two men were not what they should have been. The father's partiality in this case had led him into grievous error; for Joel and Abiah, his two sons, judges in Beersheba, walked not in the ways of Samuel, turned aside after lucre, and took bribes; and, instead of *administering* justice between man and man, with an

impartiality that never wavered either to the one side or to the other, attracted by extrinsic differences, they judged and pronounced sentence in the direction of the largest bribe, and always favourable when well feed for their judgment. This was enough to exasperate a nation, and weary it of a dynasty which, however good as an institution, had become utterly polluted in the case of Joel and Abiah, the sons of Samuel. All the elders of Israel thought this was the opportunity to step in, dislodge the existing dynasty, if such I may call it, and introduce a new thing, which the other nations had, namely, the autocracy or supremacy of one man to rule, and govern, and judge them.

The moment that Samuel heard the elders' representation, he was very much displeased; perhaps displeased with himself for what he had done, as much as displeased with the proposition that his people now made. But, at all events, he set a beautiful precedent in all similar cases; he did not abuse, or scold, nor lose his temper; he brought his perplexity into that presence where trouble finds a refuge, and difficulty a solution, and darkness light—into the presence of God, and prayed unto the Lord. The Lord, who ever hears prayer, heard Samuel; and God bade him hearken unto the voice of the people: "Give them what they want; let them make the experiment; and they will learn a lesson most important and always seasonable—that what is given in judgment never can be productive of a blessing. And therefore, Samuel, be not chagrined; do not be vexed: they have not rejected thee; but they have, through thee, the representative of the ordinance of God, rejected me. Well, hearken

to their voice ; but at the same time let them perpetrate what they now contemplate—let them have what they now demand, not in ignorance of the consequences, but being fully warned of them ; protest solemnly, and show the manner of the king that shall reign over them.” This does not imply that every king necessarily reigns thus over his people. The fact is, what is called an absolute despotism is the perfection of all government, if we could only have a perfect man to wield it, and perfect wisdom to regulate his sceptre. All our institutions of limited monarchy or republics are evidences of what many are so prone to deny, the deep-seated corruption of the human heart. We need to check power, lest it become despotism ; and liberty, lest it become license. All society exists by a system of checks and counter-checks between the ruled and the rulers. But it does not imply here that every king, even a despot, will necessarily be what is here described. The judgments that were to follow were not the result and inevitable fruits of the ordinance ; they were inflicted for the special offence of apostacy from God. Therefore he tells them what he will do : “He will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties.” That was quite right : “He will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvests, and to make his instruments of war. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive-yards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to *his servants* ; and inflict a bondage intolerable to

flesh and blood—a bondage more intolerable to you, who have tasted the sweets of liberty. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; but the Lord, having given you what you ask, will not listen to you in that day.” It would be very absurd to quote this as a proof that monarchy is condemned in Scripture, or that a republic is a Scriptural institution; it goes neither the one way nor the other: it proves that the Jews, as a peculiar people, casting off God, and insisting upon an officer and an ordinance that had never been before, should reap the fruits they had sown, and taste the bitterness of their own unholy choice.

Being thus enlightened as to the consequences of their choice, like the mob in similar circumstances—and of all despots upon earth a mob is the most intolerable—they said, “No; you may tell us all this; we do not care for that; we will have a king over us, that we may also be like the nations:” that is, “We do not want to be a little people in this district of Canaan, with peculiar rites, peculiar religion, peculiar forms, peculiar ceremonies; we should like all the equipage, the pomp, the splendour, and the etiquette of courtly life; we are sick of being a peculiar people, a chosen generation, a holy priesthood, a royal nation; we want to be like the rest of the nations of the earth.” How truly does that reflect, on a national scale, what man is still in individual instances! He goes to Rome:—“We do not like to stand by our Protestantism there, and be alone; we will do as Rome does.” He goes to Constantinople:—“We do not like to uphold our pure, simple, and *spiritual worship*; we will do as Constantinople does;”

and men change their creeds just as they change their climate. Both the Israelites, that changed their religion, and took a despotism, and the people of the nineteenth century, that change their creed with their convenience, and adapt not circumstances to conscience, but conscience to circumstances, never had either the one or the other, a deep and indestructible conviction of principle, of obligation, of duty, of loyalty, and of love.

People are restless in social things, because they have not found rest in God; and when that restlessness spreads and multiplies itself in successive breasts it sows broadcast the seeds of revolution, precipitates convulsion, and arrests the reformation that it would otherwise desire. The fault, then as now, is not in the ruler, but in the hearts of the people. The poor patient blames his nurse, his bed, his physician, when his disease alone accounts for all. The tenant blames his house, his landlord, when it is his own restless heart that is blameworthy. Poor man, like Adam and Eve, tries to lay the blame here, there, and every where, except upon what he thinks his innocent and spotless self. The truth is, there can be no true national prosperity without individual prosperity; the great stream of national prosperity is fed by rills that come from domestic altars, and from individual hearts; and until each individual reform himself, and by God's grace be regenerated in his heart, you will have no national, still less a universal, millennium of prosperity, and happiness, and peace. The Israelites desired a king, less perhaps from their hatred of Samuel, or opposition to the *régime* under which they were, and more from pride and vain-glory. The

assumed that what suited one people must necessarily suit another. They might as well say that the food that suits one must suit another—that the dress that fits one must fit another. A republic is the best for America; but that man must be very unwise, or very ill read, who would insist upon it that it must be best for us. A monarchy is best for us, and all experience attests it; and the more it is tested the more it is proved. But he would be a very rash man who should say at this moment that it would do best in America.

This incident proves that God answers prayer, occasionally, which he does not approve, and makes the answer the chastisement of the petitioner. Men often pray for what is wrong in itself, or not expedient for them, and they find God granting what they ask; but in after years they repent with bitterness of heart that they ever sought it. We sometimes pray in passion, not from principle; we ask what our passions demand, not what conscience, enlightened by God's holy word, shows to be our necessity. God sometimes—and it is the most awful answering of prayer—grants what in your passionate importunity you have asked, and you find for bread you have got a stone, for a fish a serpent, for a blessing a curse. Poverty, for instance, pines in secret, cold, naked, and miserable, in its damp, dark, and wretched home; it opens its lips, and unloads its heart, in the ear of God. It cries, what we can sympathise with, though we cannot praise, not, "Give me this day my daily bread," which would be proper, but, rising to a loftier but not a holier key, it cries from the depths of its heart *with passionate earnestness*, "Give me riches!" This

poverty that I speak of will not defraud, it will not add a cipher, it will not prefix a *one*, and plunder where it may have the power; but it will do what is still wrong—it will passionately cry, “Give me riches; make me wealthy!” God hears the cry; riches descend in showers; prosperity breaks upon that individual’s heart like sunshine upon a dungeon. He becomes wealthy suddenly; he has made haste to be rich; self-denial now becomes self-indulgence; excess now dislodges economy; the feeling, proud, unholy, and unthoughtful, is that of the foolish man—“I am great, and increased more than all, and whatsoever mine eyes desire, I keep not from them; I withhold not my heart from any joy, for my heart rejoices in all my labour that I have under the sun.” You learn, like the wise king, the wickedness of your course, and conclude, “All is vanity and vexation of spirit;” and, humbled by the experiment, your eyes are opened, and instead of praying as you prayed in your early days, “Give me riches,” you begin to pray, as you never prayed before, “O give me not poverty, lest I steal; give me not riches, lest I become proud, and forget thee; give me neither poverty nor riches, but feed me with food convenient for me.” You learn the lesson, the holy and precious lesson, that riches are not happiness, that wealth is not enjoyment, that man doth not live, in the noblest sense of living, by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. But if your prayer is not answered in this way—and if answered in this way it is answered in chastisement that sanctifies you and does you good—it may be answered, as *it was to many of the children of Israel, in wrath and*

righteous retribution. You become rich, increased in goods; you feel what all have felt that have gone before;—and, alas! with so many precedents, it is strange there should be still so many followers;—you learn that wealth is not happiness, that our wants increase just as they are indulged. The man who is now restless with £200 a-year, thinks if he could only double his income how happy he should be: it is doubled, but he finds that his wants are doubled, that his expenditure is doubled, and that the more he increases the means of gratification, the more he increases demands for gratification also. But suppose your wealth is granted, and your prayer is answered in this way, what are its effects? You sit down, surrounded by your golden heaps, you count your wealth, and you begin at last to say, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; sit down, eat, drink, and be merry.” And—“After this he lifted up his soul in hell, being in torment.” There you have the chastisement, which is mercy; here you have the retribution, which is judgment. And all retribution comes with a foot of velvet, but it strikes with a hand of steel; retribution following crime is as certain in God’s providence as echo following sound, as shadow following light. What a pity that men do not learn that not only is honesty a Christian duty, but the best policy.

I will suppose that you are not covetous—that you have another passion;—and we all ought to know that every individual has some weak point, some part in the battlements around him where he may be approached with the greatest ease, if not with the greatest success. *There is in every man’s bosom a besetting*

passion of some sort ; it is your besetting passion that you ought to watch and keep ward over. Suppose that the passion is ambition ; it cries from the lowest step of the ladder, where its foot is now placed, " O Lord, lift me higher ; raise me to the top ; make me a prince ; give me a peerage ; encircle my brow with a coronet, or," as ambition has not shrunk from crying in the pages of history, " with a crown ; or let my name be heard rolling in the breath of the trumpet of fame ; or enter it in the shining lists of genius ; let me be regarded as a great man, a wise man, a learned man, an eloquent man ; or make me powerful, or make me noble, or make me royal." God answers the prayer in wrath, not in mercy ; he says to his providential agencies, " Let it be as desired ; only protest from every pulpit, from every chapter of history, from your innermost experience, that disastrous will be the issue of so unhappy and passionate a desire." You are lifted to the high places of the earth ; you become a Secretary of State or Prime-Minister ; you become a great orator in the House—a gifted preacher in the pulpit—an able writer in the press ; name and fame are yours. The moment you are elevated and shine in a brighter light than the multitude around you, envy and jealousy, chagrined at your success, hurl against you their fiery and envenomed darts ; you are mocked, your motives misrepresented, your ends misconstrued, your name shaped into all the varieties of amusing caricature ; you are made a target for every wit to aim at ; you become the object of insult and reproach, and a capital for every needy *litterateur* to draw upon ; and you learn the lesson that *the higher the level which you tread socially, politi-*

cally, nationally, or personally, the more perilous and painful your position is. The man who has most to bear in the realm, whose temper is most tried, is he who has the weightiest load of responsibility upon his shoulders, and occupies the most prominent place in it. Far better be a peasant in some sequestered valley of the Highlands, with bread enough to eat and raiment to put on, than be the Prime-Minister of England. But ambition will not believe it, and therefore ambition cries, "Make me great!" until, at last, you attain the eminence, you are placed on the pinnacle; and how do you feel then? Not only all the inconveniences to which I have referred, and of which few can have anything like adequate experience; but when you have reached your culminating greatness,—when your name is sounded through every trumpet, and spoken of in every quarter; what then? David, the son of the humble Jesse, rose from the sheepfolds to be the monarch of the noblest nation upon earth;—did David say, "Now I am satisfied?" No; "Oh, that I had wings like a dove, that I might flee away, and be at rest for ever." Such is the prayer of ambition; such the pangs of its gratification; such the cry of him who had drunk its sweetest cup—dissatisfaction; desire to flee away, that he might enjoy what a throne could not give him—rest and peace.

Let me speak to some prosperous tradesman or merchant, overwhelmed in the stir, the bustle, and the traffic of this world. You are weary of work, and naturally so, because hard work is not always enjoyment. You long for some quiet nook, some sequestered spot which you can call a home, before you descend into the valley of *the shadow of death*. You want to lay

aside the worn robes and the dusty shoes of Cheapside and the Royal Exchange ; you long for a competence —just enough ; you would not be so foolish as to ask riches. But that word *enough* ; oh, how much ambition and covetousness does it often cover ! You attain exactly what you want ; you receive the competence you require ; you leave the din and the dust of the city far off in the remote horizon. But, alas ! you begin to find that relief from labour is not relief from disquiet ; that too little to do is as feverish as too much to do ; that with your working dress you have not put off your inveterate working habits ; and whilst you have a retreat from the counting-house in the city, you have not found a retreat in the country from the counting-house in your own heart ; for it is not the counting-house in the city that is worst ; it is the counting-house that has become branded, as it were, into our very flesh, and built up within the walls of our own heart. You are restless, dissatisfied, discontented ; you prayed for passionately what you ought to have prayed for with deep and lowly submission to the will of God ; you are really less happy in your quiet country-box than amid all the stir and the excitement of the counting-house. You take up the newspaper, not knowing what to do, and wanting something to do ; a tempting speculation is advertised —a railroad to the moon, a bank in the air, a mine in the bottom of the sea ; the more extravagant, the more brilliant is the prospect of success. You embark all you have saved in it ; you lose all, which is a matter of logical result in every instance ; and you learn that when you abandoned the post of industry, you abandoned the post of duty ; that it was not seeking to do

God's will and to be useful to your fellow-men, that prompted you to seek quiet; but selfishness, self-indulgence; you would not listen to the command, "Occupy till I come;" nor to the marching order, "Walk with me; and walk with me in the world, but not of it." You tried to go out of the world in order to be out of duty; and you feel, amidst tears, and repentance, and regrets, that God's answering that prayer of yours was not mercy, but chastisement or judgment.

Or perhaps some one cries, like the Hebrew wife of old, "Give me children, or I die," a cry as sinful as it is passionate and presumptuous. You have asked unsubmitively; you are answered. Children are given you. An Absalom springs up beneath the roof-tree of David; Hophni and Phineas in the sacerdotal presence of Eli; a Joel and an Abiah in the home of Samuel; and you learn by living examples and the wrecks they spread around you, that as you asked passionately a fish, you must not complain if God has given you justly a serpent; as you asked with sinful importunity bread, you must not complain that God has given you in his righteous retribution a stone. Such are evidences—evidences that have their truthfulness not so much in facts as in our own consciousness within—of the awful sin of seeking importunately, passionately, what we ought to seek submitively, and getting what we asked sooner and more liberally than we expected.

Instead of praying thus, let me tell you how you are to pray. First of all, seek spiritual and everlasting blessings supremest, chiefest, first of all. The prayer our Lord taught us is the precedent and model for this. "*Our Father, which art in heaven.*" What is

the first cry? Not "Give me bread," not "Forgive me sin," but "Hallowed be thy name;" the next still heavenly, "Thy kingdom come;" the next coming down nearer to earth, "Thy will be done;" then the next on earth, "Give us this day our daily bread." But we do not even venture, mark you, as taught by this beautiful example, to ask daily bread till we have prayed first that God's name may be hallowed, and God's kingdom come, and God's will be done; or, according to the prescription of our blessed Lord, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and then all the rest 'will be added.'" The true way to get earth's best things is to ask first heaven's brightest things; the true way to get earthly gifts is to seek first the unsearchable riches of Christ. By all means ask temporal things: if pining in sickness, ask health; if in poverty, ask sufficiency. If I were a curate in the Church of England, I should wish to be a bishop; if a lieutenant in the army, I should desire to be a general; if I were a midshipman, I should like to be an admiral. There is no sin so far: the sin consists in passionately demanding what you should submissively ask. "Make me a general, if it will promote Thy glory, and do me and my fellow-creatures good; make me a bishop, if it will promote thy praise, and make me the instrument of good among others." Ever add that; say to God, as a child to a father, what your liking is, but ever pray to God for what you would like in deep, earnest submission to him, closing every prayer with these words, "Yet, holy Father, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Pray that in whatever way God *answers* your prayer, it may be so sweetened, so

stified, that it shall contribute to your eternal rests. If man's chief end be to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever, then whatever does not contribute that cannot be a blessing. Therefore, pray that if God give you riches, you may never set your heart upon them, but that they may help you to set your heart upon the giver of them; if God give you power and eminence in this world, pray that these may never darken your everlasting prospects, or lead you for one moment to forget and to forsake God. Pray not only for temporal things submissively, but pray for them as merely a means of your sanctification and fitness for heaven. Pray for temporal blessings, not selfishly, but for the sake of doing good to others. Solomon was wiser than all, not that he might dictate to all, but that he might communicate his wisdom to all. One man is made richer than others, not that he may, like a vortex, absorb all, but that, like a fresh and living fountain, he may overflow, and make all green and beautiful for many a mile around him. Let it ever be your prayer, "God be merciful unto me, and bless me, and cause thy face to shine upon me, that thy way may be known upon the earth, and thy saving health among all nations." Seek character more earnestly than happiness. Character constitutes happiness; what is called happiness does not constitute character. Oh, that we could only feel this one lesson in this world, where there is such love of wealth, of power, and such unprecedented pursuit of it! Would to God that we all felt—It is not what a man has, but what a man is, that makes his happiness. The heart makes the lowest hut a home, if that heart be right in its polarity to God; and the heart, if wrong,

makes the most splendid palace a dungeon, proving that it is what we are that determines the tone, the nature, the degree, the extent, and endurance of what we feel and have. Pray in all your prayers that God's holy will in everything may be done. I admit when one is prospered in the world, it is the easiest thing possible to pray thus. It does not need the Spirit of God to teach us to say, "Thy will be done," when we are moving amid sunshine, increasing in wealth, growing in prosperity, in power; oh! it is so sweet then and so easy to say, "Our Father, thy will be done." In life's shady places, as well as in sunshine; in the hour of adversity, as well as in the hour of prosperity; when laid upon the sick-bed, with pining sickness within and poverty around, it needs grace to teach us, what it would be well to seek that grace to impress upon us now, to say from the very heart, "Our Father, thy will be done." Yet the man that can thus pray in the worst of circumstances, has in the very utterance of the prayer the first instalment of peace. There is no burden so heavy upon the shoulders that it is not lightened by kneeling under it; there is no cup so bitter that it is not sweetened by just mentioning it in prayer.

This God to whom we should thus pray, "Our Father in heaven," in whom we believe, is not a God distant, but is now—what a thought!—as near to the humblest widow, the poorest orphan, as he is to the bright cherubim that are about his throne. He that regulates the march of the stars,—the winding of the humblest worm upon the street; he that sees the splendour of the sun, sees with equal clearness the eye of the minutest insect; he whose eye follows Arcturus

and the Pleiades through streets of stars, follows the humblest beggar with equal precision, equal clearness, through all the streets of this great metropolis. He is not a God afar off; but in the height and in the depth, in the shadow and in the sunshine, "Thou, God, seest me."

I received a letter from an officer—a stranger to me—who passed through all the scenes of 1854 and 1855 in the Crimea, and took his part in all its great conflicts; he writes that some little book of mine, given him by his mother, in the midst of those dreadful scenes brought, he says, one thought to his heart which sustained it and cheered it through all. He had been accustomed to think that religion was a terrible thing, that God was an awful being, that to pray was very dreadful; and he says, "One single sentence in this little book brought to my heart, and convinced me while it brought it, that religion is a joyous thing, that God is our Father, that Christ is our Saviour; that the elastic step and the firm heart must be his who knows that God is his Father; heaven, come what may, bullet or sword, his home, and eternity the measure of his life-time." And from that moment he became a joyous and a happy Christian, a child of God, and an heir of the kingdom of heaven, as far as we can judge, and is spared to come home and testify that it is so.

SAUL.

CHAPTER IX.

GOD'S PERMISSION OF EVIL. SAUL'S ERRAND. HIS APPLICATION TO SAMUEL ABOUT THE LOST PROPERTY. OFFERING TO THE MAN OF GOD. ACCIDENTS. SAUL'S FUTURE REVEALED.

IN the previous chapter we had the account of the strange and ungrateful desire of the children of Israel to have a king as a permanent and lasting institution instead of an occupant of the temporary, and, if we might call them so, transient offices which were then filled by the judges in the land of Israel. I show that for this change in the national temper and politics there was a seeming reason, partly in the misconduct of the two sons of Samuel, and partly in the discontent and dissatisfaction which that misconduct had originated among the people; but, at the same time, it was obvious that their desire to have a king was mainly induced by their desiring the pomp, and splendour and courtly equipage of the surrounding nations, and being dissatisfied with their own bare and naked polity—a polity, however, which was the direct institution and inspiration of God himself. Having desired a king, God tells Samuel that he was to permit them to have what they wanted, but at the same time to tell *them that if they insisted upon having this office*

whose strict definition is despot, or tyrant—for such is the proper meaning of it—they should feel deep regret, from disastrous experience, that they had ever come to this determination. Suffering, and oppression, and bitter bondage would result therefrom. God having thus permitted them to have what their passions demanded, tells Samuel that he is to make arrangements for that purpose, and help them to the accomplishment of their desire—an evidence to us that God permits many things in providence which he does not approve; his permission of a fact, a relationship, an event, is not necessarily the approval of that fact, relationship, or event. It might be argued, if one were disposed to be metaphysical:—since God has omnipotent power and omnipotent love, why does he permit things that are in themselves wrong? We answer that he has made us rational, intelligent, reasonable beings, to be guided by motives, drawn by hopes, directed by precepts, and therefore we must act as such. If we were mere dumb animals, then we should require to be impelled by force; but being rational, intelligent beings, we must be acted on by motives, by hopes, and reasons. And unless, therefore, God were to alter the very structure and economy of man, we cannot conceive any arrangement different from what is. He might by a miracle arrest the spread of all sin at once, superinduce the reign of all glory and happiness; but he does not. I have no doubt when we see the end of all—the winding up of that perplexing and tangled mystery which life and the world now form—that we shall be constrained to acknowledge that every step God arranged was right, and that *God's permissions* were all in mercy, in wis-

dom, and in love, and that we could not have wished any one thing to have been otherwise from what it actually has been.

We read that a son of Kish, a Benjamite, whose name was Saul, very tall and imposing in his appearance, and easily distinguished by the height of his stature from the rest of the people, was sent, as the world would say accidentally, to seek for the stray cattle of his father. He went through several places along with his servant, but failed to find them in any one of them. At last the servant suggested that there was a man of God, that is, a seer or a prophet, and that they might go and consult him about the stray cattle, if peradventure they might find them—a very striking and suggestive fact, that man will inquire at every oracle to recover lost property, when he will not be at the trouble to read God's word, to ascertain and find the safety of his lost soul. They had never thought of going to this prophet before, and they were now to employ this prophet, if he would consent to be so employed, in a most servile work; and therefore they agreed to go and consult him. The servant said to Saul, "I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver: that will I give to the man of God to tell us our way." This must not be set down as a bribe to provoke his favourable opinion; but it was always the custom, in ancient and eastern times, for one person inferior in rank or in office approaching another, to make him a present, however small it might be,—and it was generally small,—to express deference, and courtesy, and respect. It was not here intended by Saul to be a bribe to Samuel, nor did Samuel accept it as a bribe in any sense whatever.

Then, having found that they had something they could present, they resolved to go. "And as they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water,"—as persons even of rank did in those days, not menial persons,—“and said unto them, Is the seer here? And they answered, He is.” Now mark here how all seems accident emerging from accident until the ultimate result; and yet over all this God was superintending, directing, controlling, restraining. Nothing can be more accidental than the events of the story; but nothing can be more evident than that God was over all, and directing all to one definite issue,—namely, the appointment of Saul as king of the children of Israel. In this world and in our lives, we see events succeeding one another,—we do not see any hand coming through the cloud, giving its mission to any one of them; but though we do not see it, yet, as truly as there is a God, he is in life's minutest eddy, as well as in national cataracts and convulsions,—he is in all that is little, as well as in all that is large; so truly, that there is nothing upon earth that comes by chance—it is either permitted, or is actually commanded, by Him who is in all that is exquisitely minute, and all that is magnificently great. In this chapter we have not only the under movement, but we have the lifting of the veil, and the light of heaven let fall upon it. It is no less so now, but it is not so revealed now as it was then.

Well, they went up to the city, and Samuel came out. And the Lord, we are told, had stated a day before to Samuel that Saul was to come, saying, "Tomorrow, about this time, I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to

be captain over my people Israel." We observe here how God sends Saul, while it was his father that sent him; it was the loss of his father's cattle that made him send him; it was the accident of meeting with the maidens drawing water that enabled him to find out where Samuel was, and helped Samuel to find Saul; and yet all the while it was God that was sending Saul to Samuel, and Samuel to Saul—a striking proof how man's free will is compatible with God's sovereign agency,—the one fulfilling the decisions of the other, not the one in any shape contradicting or destroying the other.

When Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, he said, not knowing he was Samuel, "Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is?" The word "seer," in Hebrew, means simply "one that sees," meaning, of course, sees higher, deeper, further than other people. Samuel answered him at once, "I am the seer." And then, turning away his thoughts from the lost cattle, he says, "As for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them, for they are found. There is a far greater matter in hand; let the dead bury their dead; care not about these terrestrial and transient things: I have to talk with you about a greater mission, a far grander and more precious result." And when he hinted to him that a great destiny was before him, that a splendid mission was entrusted to him, Saul answered, "This is impossible; am I not a Benjamite, one of the smallest and most contemptible of the tribes of Israel, and my family the very least and obscurest of all the families of Benjamin? wherefore speakest thou so to me?" As *much as to say*, "You mock me; it is impossible that

I should be selected for so great a destiny." But Samuel took him, and made him sit in the chiefest place, and share the rights of hospitality, which were the symbols of friendship, and communion, and love and then told him that he wished to talk with him on the top of the house. In eastern countries, the roof of the house is used as the place for conference at early morn, and at evening twilight; and, therefore, he asks him to come and talk with him there, as the most sequestered and secluded place. And then the next chapter begins with the statement that "Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?"

So man arranges, so God orders; so man sets out to seek his lost asses—in the wonderful providence of God he finds an unexpected crown.

SAUL'S CONSECRATION.

CHAPTER X.

CONFIRMATORY SIGNS. SAUL AMONG THE PROPHETS. ISRAEL REJECTING GOD. ELECTION FROM THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN. GOD SAVE THE KING!

IT is important we should recollect, in order to understand these chapters, that the Israelites, dissatisfied with the government of a pure theocracy administered by special men, called judges in Israel, and charmed with the pomp and splendour of the despotism of surrounding nations, insisted at length upon having a fixed dynasty—a permanent king, or ruler, over them. We afterwards read that God told Samuel that though their request was sinful, and arose from sinful motives, and would be followed by the most disastrous consequences, yet that he would grant it; and on that I took the opportunity of stating that when we ask things rashly and passionately, without any reference to his will, God sometimes grants them, and the gifts that he bestows in answer to such prayers are the greatest calamities that can betide or befall us. In the future rest we shall doubtless have to thank God as often for withholding what we asked, as we shall have to praise him for giving what we asked. Having resolved *to give them a king*, he pointed out to Samuel, as we

read in the previous chapter, who that party should be. Saul, the son of Kish, was to be appointed and anointed king, notwithstanding his own declinature at the first, and his conscious unworthiness of it, so properly and so suitably expressed. The last chapter accordingly closed with the statement that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house—that is, the highest room of the house—where there was quiet and retirement, and talked over with him the great destiny that, by divine ordination, was before him, concluding with the first verse of this chapter (which really belongs to the previous one), where we read that “Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?” Then he states to him that certain signs, or predictions of signs, should be fulfilled, and that each incident, coming to pass precisely as Samuel foretold, would be to Saul confirmatory proof that God had chosen or appointed him to be king over Israel. Samuel tells him also that when these signs come to pass, he should do as occasion serves—that is, follow the leadings of God’s providential government.

We read after this that he met the company of prophets, and that the Spirit of God came upon him; he was turned into another man, and began to prophesy like the rest. The word “prophet” is used in the Old Testament, and also in the New, not in the sense, as we commonly take it, of predicting future events, but of proclaiming present and instant duties. You will constantly read of “prophesying” and “prophet,”—not in the sense of foretelling futurity, which is a subsequent sense, but under the meaning of pro-

claiming truths from God, and duties devolving upon them that hear those truths. Now Saul did not predict on this occasion what should be, but he proclaimed God's will, and mind, and law, and man's duties and responsibilities. And as he did so, the change was so vast, the alteration in his whole tone, temperament, and character so striking, that the people asked in amazement, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Samuel called the people together, and told them that God had commissioned him to say that they had that day rejected him. "Ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now, therefore, present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes, and by your thousands;" that is to say, "Though you have rejected God, though you have asked for what is not right, God has given you what you ask; and he now orders you to take the steps to accomplish the desire of your hearts." Samuel caused all the tribes to come near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken; then out of the tribe of Benjamin a family, and then out of that family one man—Saul: but when they sought him they could not find him. "Therefore they inquired of the Lord further, if the man should yet come thither. And the Lord answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff. And they ran and fetched him thence." Then Samuel presented him, and said, "Here is the personage you asked for, ready to fulfil the duties you have devolved upon him; and now accept him as your king, anointed of God, asked for by yourselves, and in all respects such a *king as you would have.*" And the moment that the

people saw him, they gave their unanimous consent by shouting "God save the king!"

Saul went home to Gibeah, and there went with him a number of men,—not who had been sanctified by God's grace, which is not the meaning of the phrase, "Whose hearts God had touched;" but a number of men touched with the feeling of loyalty and allegiance to his throne, and ready to assist, and stand by, and defend him: whilst there was a remnant of unprincipled men, who spoke of him in contempt, "Shall this man save us?" But Saul had the good sense not to retaliate as they deserved, but to hold his peace, and go on his way in the fear of God.

THE DISOBEDIENCE OF ISRAEL.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COWARDS OF JABESH. THE CONDITION DEMANDED BY NAHASH. LIGHT AND SIGHT HATED BY TYRANTS. SAUL'S DECISION. THE SIGNAL. EFFECT ON THE COWARDS.

I MUST again ask the reader to keep in mind the circumstances in which the children of Israel were placed in the now conquered, but not yet peaceful land of Palestine. They were placed in a country full of foes, bitter and subtle foes. They had not executed—as they ought to have done—that retributive judgment on the Canaanites which they had been commanded to inflict by God himself; and those that they spared out of false compassion—as if they were wiser and more merciful than God—were as thorns and briars to them, ceaseless sources of plague, and trouble, and provocation. In this disobedience of theirs we see the reason of the numerous incidental wars, and skirmishes, and conflicts between them; and this explains the circumstances in which this chapter has its origin. It appears that the inhabitants of Jabesh came into contact with Nahash the Ammonite, a powerful despot, with great forces around him and at his bidding: “And all the men of Jabesh said *unto Nahash*, Make a covenant with us, and we will

serve thee." They were evidently cowards; they wept when they ought to have fought; they begged for mercy when they ought to have stood to what was duty; and therefore they went, in the most cringing and contemptible manner, and said to Nahash, "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee; only spare us, do not kill us, and then we will be your slaves." Whenever you yield below what is dutiful and right, you will find that the party to whom you yield will exact more than is convenient to you, or even right or proper on his part; and hence Nahash, like all tyrants, seeing that the ball was at his foot, that the issues were in his hand, proposed terms to them the most debasing and the most degrading; saying, "I will make a covenant with you, I will be good friends with you, I will lay aside all hostile purposes, but I insist on this condition,—that you allow me to thrust out the right eye of every inhabitant of Jabesh." Well, of course the result of that would have been incapacitation for future warfare; and secondly, they would have been branded with a mark of ignominy unmistakable, open, and visible to all, as slaves and serfs,—hewers of wood and drawers of water. This is the practice of great tyrants—an experience that we know nothing of, happily, situated as we are, under a free constitution;—but wherever despots have been, they have always found that the first thing necessary to their despotism being continued and increased, has been not the putting out literally of the right eye, but extinguishing all light, putting an interdict upon a free press, muffling the expression of every sentiment; giving every *man liberty to write and speak*, provided he write and

speaking what is dictated to him by the party that gives him the liberty; and shutting up, in the next place, the Bible—for every tyrant knows that despotism, oppression, the enslavement of a people, never can exist with an open Bible, liberty to read, explain, and understand it. And therefore, in order that despotism may build its throne, it must always put out the eye of a free press—a press that may be licentious, but even its licence, into which liberty occasionally degenerates, is not so bad as its suppression; then shut the Bible, lest people should understand their duties to their God, and in the light of these, their duty to all mankind, how to defend, and protect, and preserve them; and therefore the right eye is put out; and in darkness all colours are alike; where there is no knowledge the people must perish; and thus we come back to the olden lesson we should never forget, that an open Bible is one of the springs of all our national freedom, our national privileges: and the nations of the earth, ground down by terrible despotism, crushed by monstrous concordats, bound hand and foot by those that ape the privileges and prerogatives, but have nothing of the love, the justice, and the compassion of the merciful Saviour—all should know, that the instant that there is an open Bible, and liberty to read it, the darkness, the despotism, the superstition, all that crushes, all that oppresses, will fly away like the owls and the bats of night, before the first sprinkling of the sunbeams upon the earth.

The inhabitants of Jabesh, already crushed and faint-hearted, said, “Well, we have no help; but just give us seven days’ respite, that we may send *messengers* unto all the coasts of Israel; and then, if

there be no man to save us, we will come out to thee. Then came the messengers to Gibeah of Saul, and told the tidings in the ears of the people: and all the people," cowards as they were, instead of each man doing his duty, and defending an assailed sister country, "lifted up their voices and wept." Now comes out the advantage of Saul as the king and the ruler of Palestine: they asked for a king, they got their request; they were told that eventually it would be a calamity; but that calamity was lightened and redeemed by many bright spots of sunshine in his history; and this is one of the most brilliant and praiseworthy. As soon as this king, who had the spirit of a ruler, and the feeling of an Israelite, saw them weeping, he said, "What aileth the people that they weep? And they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh. And the spirit of God came upon Saul;"—that is, God inspired him, taught him what to do; and he took a yoke of oxen, hewed them in pieces, sent them through all the land, and told the people that a similar blow would be struck upon all their property and possessions, unless they would rally round his standard;—an incident almost analogous to the fiery cross in the Highlands of Scotland, which only ceased to be a fact in 1745, in which the chief sent round the banner, and all the accompaniments of it, calling all his clan to gather round his standard, and prepare to fight with him and for him against what he believed or said were the enemies of his country or of his clan; showing how eastern customs have perpetuated themselves or drifted westward, and become incorporated with the habits of western nations,—one of those *fugitive but not unsuggestive* incidents which show

that all the sections of the human race have a common origin, and are all connected each with the other by bonds and ties that human tradition has preserved.

We then read that Saul mustered all his troops, and they came out: "And the men of Jabesh said to Nahash the Ammonite, To-morrow we will come out unto you, and you shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you." They said that, however, to put him off his guard, and not to let him know what aid was coming to their assistance. So on the morrow Saul arranged all the people, defeated the Ammonites, scattered them over the whole earth; and then the people, who were weeping before, who were too cowardly to strike, who were too depressed, and crushed, and broken in spirit, to make a single effort, valiantly exclaimed, "Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? Bring the men that we may put them to death. This is just the man we want; he has gained us the victory, he has saved us from destruction; and now if anybody dare to say a word against him,"—although they themselves had probably been speaking against him before, or had no confidence in him,— "then we will take such a one, and put him to death." But Saul, with great genius—and it requires as much genius to use a victory as to gain one—had the good principle and the good sense to use his victory temperately, moderately, with compassion; and therefore he said, "There shall not a man be put to death this day; for it is not I"—beautiful and creditable thought—"it is not I that have gained the victory: it is the Lord that hath wrought salvation in Israel; and unto him be all the praise and the honour."

SALVATION IN ISRAEL.

CHAPTER XI.

“For to-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel.”—
1 SAMUEL XI. 13.

I ADMIT the words are strictly historical, and in their textual relationship connected with the victory which Saul had gained over Nahash the Ammonite, and in defence of the rights, the liberty, and the safety of the men of Jabesh-gilead. But at the same time, this phrase so often occurs in the Bible,—“Salvation is of the Lord;”—so often do we read of God as the God of our salvation; so frequently is this most musical word found in the Old and New Testament Scriptures, describing a salvation invested with greater interests, and reflecting a greater glory, that I shall view it in connexion with that great salvation which the Lord hath wrought in the midst of his people, when Christ was born, and lived, and died,—a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the salvation of his people Israel.

In order to see our need of this salvation, it is essential that we should clearly see and feel the depth of our ruin, the extent of our aberration from God, the terrible condition of misery and sin into which the primal *transgression* in Paradise, with all its pro-

geny since, has plunged all mankind. But I need not give proofs of this; the tears of the weeper— hearts that are broken—homes that are desolate— pining sickness, griefs of all kinds, ills and aches, and the burden and the weight of years,—all testify that something has gone wrong with us, that some great calamity has overtaken us. We were not made so, we were not meant to be so; and the whole cause and spring of all the evil is not in God, but in the creature by sin; for “the wages of sin is death.” Death, or the ultimate destruction that necessarily follows sin, is not an arbitrary infliction on the part of God. We are very prone to admit that sin is a great evil; but we are no less prone to think that God’s infliction of penalty is a very arbitrary thing: and we have a latent and lurking notion, if we do not clothe it in words, that God might, after all, spare the guilty, that he need not be so strict to punish; in other words, that the punishment that follows sin, whatever it be, is not a necessary consequence. Now, what I want to show is, that sin leads to retribution,—has in its bosom corresponding punishment, by a law as necessary, as natural, as immutable, as that if you put your hand in the fire it will be burnt—if the thermometer fall below zero, that it will freeze—or that a flower shall evolve in spring from the plant on which it grows. In other words, the punishment of sin is not an arbitrary penalty which may be arbitrarily removed; but it is a necessary, natural, inevitable evolution of what sin is, and inseparable from it—just as holiness, and justice, and truth are inseparable from God. Let me try to show the truth of this. First of all, we read in the Bible, what indeed we should infer

if we did not read it, that man was placed under law. In order to show how natural and reasonable this is, I have only to show that all created things with which we come into contact in God's natural world are under law. The process of vegetation, the falling of a leaf, the march of planets in their orbits; growth, reproduction, and decay; all these things are under and obedient to fixed, immutable, and lasting laws. It is a law that plants shall grow; that water by gravitation shall descend; that winds shall move; that flowers shall blossom; and that fruits shall ripen when the flower has decayed. This is God's great law: we may see things disturbing, intruding upon it, in consequence of what has taken place by sin; but we see enough of it to infer a universal and always immutable law. The realm of nature, subject to laws that govern it, is a dim shadow of the realm of spirit under laws in their nature corresponding to it. If God has put his natural world—fruit, flower, pebble, water, or star—under fixed laws by which they are governed, it is but just and natural to infer that he has not left his moral world free from the same government and restraint of law. Now, wherever law is, we naturally infer there is penalty. In the physical world, or the laws of which I have spoken, there is penalty wherever the physical law is transgressed. Go into our social world: wherever the law which man gives, the law of the land, is transgressed, there is penalty. It would be a sorry law that has no penalty. We find, therefore, in God's natural world, penalty following transgression of law; and we find penalty following the transgression of law in man's social world: and I again remark that this penalty is, neither in the

physical world, nor in man's social world, and therefore not in man's moral world, an arbitrary infliction, but of the very necessity and nature of things. Let us see it in man's physical world: let a bird leave the air on which it spreads its wing, and take to the sea as its home: the law comes instantly into force, it must perish. Let the ant leave its hillock, and turn to feed upon the flowers: the result will be that the ant will have no store in winter, the bee will be starved of what it exacts as its tribute, and the dissemination of the seeds of plants will be put an end to by the absence of the bee that scatters and circulates them over all the earth: so that not only will the ant, by leaving its own proper province, and entering into another, be punished itself, but it will be necessary to punish it, and put a stop to it, because it disturbs and destroys the order and the harmony of things, and other insects are injured by its transgression. Let a planet move by an eccentric force out of its orbit; not only will that planet instantly come under disorganizing influences itself, but it will impinge against the earth, the moon, or other planetary bodies; and, destroying itself first, it will destroy by its action surrounding worlds that are otherwise independent of it. Thus we see that in God's natural world, if a creature leave its own province; that is, transgress—for what is transgression—*transgredior*, "I go beyond;"—if a creature leave its own province, that is, transgress its law, it injures itself; secondly, it injures others, as in the case of the ant referred to,—as in the case of the planet also referred to; and the consequence is, punishment is not only an essential retribution on the *transgressor*, as the fruit of sin, but it is a necessary

infliction for the safety of the whole universe of animate and responsible beings. Let me show this in another province, in the natural or physical law: let a man place his hand in the fire, the natural law instantly comes into action,—the hand is burnt: let another swallow poison; instantly the law shall have its effect,—his health is destroyed: let a man breathe vitiated air; forthwith the law comes into action, and he is destroyed. In all this is evolved a very striking fact—God's reverence for law is, if possible, greater than for life. In other words, if you eat poison, rather than God invert his law, he will allow your life to be destroyed: if you put your hand in the fire, rather than neutralize or repeal his law, God will allow your hand to be burnt. There is a fixity in God's laws that govern his material world so stern, so unsparing, so absolute, that he will allow the death of the creature rather than repeal the great law which is necessary for the safety and the salvation of all. There is one single element that comes into play that is to us suggestive of something higher; it is the fact—and a beautiful and interesting fact it is—that whilst law is thus stern, unsparing, continuous, immutable, in its penalties and in its action, there seems to be still left in our world a sort of restorative power, as if to mitigate the ravages, the awful ravages, of a violated and a broken law. You see it in such an instance as this: if your finger is diseased, or if your hand is burned, the whole recuperative and restorative energy of your system is concentrated upon the suffering member, in order to put it right, if possible. If a wild animal cry in the desert because it is assailed,

other wild beasts will hear that cry, and show their sympathy, and rush, if possible, to rescue it. May there not be here in nature one of those dim pre-figurations of what was once a possibility, what has always been a promise, what is now a glorious truth,—that the Great Restorer will one day step in and arrest the action of law, not by repealing law, but by the over-abounding force of mercy, goodness, and loving-kindness—of restorative suffering, of atoning sacrifice, and compensatory death?

Having seen in all these things how fixed and immutable law is, we must infer that if God's material and physical laws are thus permanent and immutable in their action, his moral law, under which he has placed his responsible and intelligent offspring, will not be less immutable, less lasting, or less decided and undiluted in its action. We cannot conceive a creature not under law. There is none but God who is not under law; the highest cherubim that soar about his throne and sing his praise, are as much under his moral law and government as the minutest microscopic insect that dances in the sunbeam. There is no such thing as a creature either beyond law, or above law, or able to defy law. By its very constitution and nature it is placed under and subject to law. If we find all things in the material world around us subject to law, and under its influence, and suffering its penalty if it transgress it, we must infer—what now is no longer an inference, but a revelation, for God has told us—that man also, his responsible and moral creature, is under law. If God be holy, he will not suffer sin—which outrages and insults that holiness—to go with impunity; if God be benevolent, he will

not suffer any transgressor who has gone, under an eccentric influence, out of his orbit, impinging against others, and destroying them, to go on without retribution, arrest, and condign punishment. Man is placed under moral law, just like the rest of God's creatures. And what we infer we find recorded expressly in the Scripture, that "the wages of sin is death;" "the soul that sins shall die." Therefore it is not an arbitrary law, nor a mere infliction of despotism, but a necessary result, that as, if I put my hand in the fire it will be burnt—as, if I breathe carbonic-acid gas I shall be poisoned—as, if I eat strychnia I shall be destroyed; so, in the same way, and according to the same analogy, and as surely, if a man sin—that is, transgress God's higher moral law—death, with all its issues, is not an arbitrary infliction, but a product, the natural and necessary result,—as effect comes from cause, as echo comes from sound, as shadow is preceded by light. This being the case, we see now that the great curse that has fallen upon all mankind is not the arbitrary infliction of a tyrant, but the law, the everlasting law, circulating over all the universe, known to all its innumerable hosts, that wherever sin is there shall be death; wherever holiness is there shall be happiness. We chose, and, alas! we choose, to break that law,—to do what it forbids, to perpetrate what it interdicts in every tone: and our death, our eternal death, is not the arbitrary infliction of a despot, who might not do it, but the result of a law which existed myriads of millennia before our world was made; and not only so, but it is absolutely necessary to the safety of God's mighty universe that every *transgressor going from the orbit in which he was*

placed should be punished, and his injurious influence put an end to.

Can this be retrieved? Is salvation possible? The law cannot be repealed or be reversed: God's world and God's holiness require the infliction of penalty. There is a way of life, if such can be found—mark the words—if such can be found, full of infinite compensatory or restorative virtue, able to atone for the evil that is done, to reinstate us in the glory we have forfeited, and to arrest the evil, to resist the destructive spread of our transgression upon the rest of mankind; thus only it is possible, without diluting, or repealing, or arresting law, to find acceptance and forgiveness, and the reversal of the curse, with all its terrible disasters. Christ's perfect obedience and sacrifice met this. But how? Christ's sacrifice and perfect obedience from first to last were super-legal; because he was the Legislator above law, not a creature under law. Now, if Christ's work and merit were above law, in that region which law does not reach, or in no sense under it, then it may have excellence to reach sinners, who are under law. Christ's mission was the descent of one who was above law, not liable to law,—in order to redeem those who were subject to law. I will give it in the words of two writers: one was Anselm, an archbishop of Canterbury, and who saw far above his day, who makes these admirable remarks, which convey the idea more fully than I could do: he says, "To make satisfaction, this God-man must pay something he does not owe on his own account. As a man he owes perfect obedience for himself; this, then, cannot be *satisfaction*. But being a *sinless* man, he is not bound

to die; his death, therefore, as the death of the God-man, is the adequate and proper satisfaction." These words are most just. A modern writer says, "If one transgressor be saved, it must be an interposition of the Lawgiver, who maintains the law, while mercy rests on the offender." He acutely and strikingly remarks, "Power above law is neither justice nor mercy; but merit above law is both. Divine interposition to save the lost would be therefore a substitution of its own merit in order to maintain the law, while mercy interposed in order to redeem the sinner." If by a mere act of power on the part of Him who is above law, he were to admit sinners as they are into heaven, that would be simply reversing, destroying, or repealing it. But merit above law, not due to law, as it was not on Christ's part, becomes at once a capital of mercy to the sinner, and the maintenance of law; for, being above it and beyond it, and not under its action and control, it is disposable for us and for our salvation. There is therefore in Christ pardon for our sins, merit for our justification; and so God is just whilst he justifies them that believe. Merit infinite in amount, beyond the region of law, is made available to us who are under law: and thus God can be just in maintaining the exactions of the law, whilst merciful in forgiving the sinners who have unhappily and sinfully broken it.

There is also a sanctifying energy, as well as the Holy Spirit, given to them that are thus justified, which restores the image of God; there is also an inspiration from on high, the result of pardon, and adoption, and sanctification, which prompts every man that receives these blessings to go forth, and, in the

exercise of the restorative virtue he has received, to spread it to the ends of the earth, till all that sin has done wrong is rectified. Paradise, at length, is restored. The requirements of the case are met: first, if one shall be found full of infinite compensatory merit. Christ is that one,—above the law as the Legislator, not under the law as the creature; able to atone for the evil done. He has suffered when, being sinless, it was not necessary he should suffer; and therefore the atonement is made that we should be reinstated, as the result, in the forfeited inheritance. We are purchased by his blood; we are pardoned, and justified, and entitled to everlasting joy. Lastly, that there should be some provision by which an arrest could be laid upon the outgoing destructive influences which sin has introduced, and which, if unchecked, must involve the very universe in ruin, according to the law by which every man who becomes a Christian feels it his mission to Christianise: made right himself, he feels it an instinct implanted from on high to go forth and put others right also.

These are abstract thoughts. I trust that they are not too metaphysical. They are precious thoughts, and cast light on doctrinal difficulties.

This salvation, the result of the merit of Him who is above the law, is the provision of sovereign, undeserved, unmerited grace. Salvation was not deserved by us, nor won by us; but done for us, and is offered to us from the throne every day that we hear the gospel preached or taught. There was no obligation on God's part thus to interpose; there was no right *on our part* thus to obtain it. The Lawgiver,

above the law, interposed in his sovereignty; why he passed by the fallen fiends that are in hell, and lighted, in his love and mercy, upon us, is one of those deep facts that ought to make us very thankful, very humble, and to feel more profoundly than we have ever felt before, what a magnificent salvation is that which is by grace, and not of works, lest any man should boast. Grace originated it all, and love without parallel or precedent executed it, and wisdom inscrutable devised it. Christ Jesus, without constraint from above or claim below, interposed and died for us: and therefore as salvation by grace, and to the praise of grace, is the happy fact below, salvation to our God and to the Lamb is the never-ceasing, joyful song of the redeemed above.

This salvation, thus free and sovereign, thus based on the strongest, surest foundations, is offered to all. Whatever it may be in its application to any, it is freely, *bond fide*, offered to every human being that hears it. It is not true that it is to be preached only to the elect; it is to be preached to sinners as such, without admitting the element of elect or non-elect, predestinated or unpredestinated; it is unto all and upon all that will take it; it recognises no distinctions; it overflows all the sand-ridges of social division; it rises to, and reaches, and gives pardon to the greatest sin; it follows, and pursues, and lays hold on the oldest and the worst of sinners; so that if any man perish, it is not because God will not save him, it is not because salvation cannot reach and overwhelm his sins, as the ocean would bury them in its depths; but solely and wholly, because one goes to his farm, another to his merchandise, another to his

home, and anywhere and everywhere; giving to things that perish an importance that he denies to the salvation of his immortal soul. Your right to hear the gospel—oh! wondrous grace—is just your own self-inflicted ruin. If you be not sinners there is no salvation for you; if you be sinners—the oldest, the chiefest, the wickedest, the worst—there is for you this very day pardon for the greatest sin, cancelling of the longest life of transgression; and God, instead of being unwilling to receive you, the instant he sees you in the far distant horizon he gives notice to choirs of cherubim and seraphim, and they will join in the glorious anthem that ever sounds and is ever sweet: “Let us rejoice; this my son was lost, and is found; was dead, and is now alive.” Our very disfranchisement from heaven is our franchise to Christ: that which keeps us out of heaven is that which makes us welcome to the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. I wish we could look upon the gospel less as law; I wish you could look upon all these truths as some dead things that lie far remote from us, or transcendantly above us. It is now—and what a thought!—it is now true that Jesus died and suffered, and God loved and planned, and prophets wrote, and psalmists sung, and evangelists have written, and apostles have preached, as truly for thee, my brother, thee, my sister, as if there never had been, is not now, and will not be, another individual but thyself in the world.

This salvation is received by faith alone. It is by grace—that is, it is undeserved; it is offered to all; it is received by faith alone. Do not think of faith as of some abstraction, some grand thing for theologians to *talk about*, but not meant for the ordinary level of

mankind. Faith in Christ is so far identical with faith in other things. On Saturday night—if you are merchants or tradesmen—you deposit all the stores of the week in some banking-house. Now, notwithstanding an occasional breach of trust here and there, you have confidence in your banker that he will safely keep what you put in his hands. That is an act of faith. The only difference here is that what you deposit in the hands of the Lord of glory never can meet with disaster; for you can say when you have done it, “I know in whom I have believed; and that he is able to keep what I have committed to him against that day.” When you take a five-pound or a ten-pound Bank of England note, you give your goods for it, and you get in exchange that bank-note. What is that? Your faith in those copper-plate words, and in that water-mark, and in that piece of paper, and in the institution from which it comes. If you had not confidence in it, of course you would not accept it. What is faith in Christ? Just taking God at his word; believing what he says is true, and acting upon it; that is to say, carrying it into personal and practical action. Faith is confidence in God’s word, and in Christ our sacrifice. Oh! what a tremendous thought at a judgment-seat if God should tell us, “What! you could not believe! Did you put faith in a Bank of England note? Did you put faith in Coutts, in Drummond, and did you never dare to put faith in me? you could not take my word!” What an awful thing! It is true faith is the gift of God and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But this does not modify what I have said. We injure the gospel by mixing it up with *incomprehensible* abstractions. The simplest

thing in the world is salvation ; the simplest thing in the world is the way of being saved ; and what you are called upon to do is to take God at his word. If, when offered this Bank of England note for your goods, instead of taking it for what it is worth, you were to begin to try what sort of paper it was made of, whether the ink was indelible, and to copy the pictures on it, and to admire the exquisite mechanism, if I may so call it, of the bank-note, you would waste time, and show want of confidence. I want you less to criticise this and that in the Bible, and oftener to open it, and take God at his word. When he says, "Jesus Christ is come into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief," do not ask, "Is it for me?" ask rather, Why not for me? Your qualification is sin, your fitness is sin ; and if you be a sinner, the chiefest of sinners, why, you are just the very person that Jesus Christ came into the world to save. Faith is in all its simplicity flying to the city of refuge, washing, that you may be clean. It is neither doing, nor buying, nor waiting, nor hesitating ; it is a feast made for you, you have only to sit down and eat it ; it is a wedding garment spun, woven for you, you have only to put it on. It is an ark sailing on the sea, and you are floating on a shattered wreck : you have only to get in, and be wafted to the haven of everlasting rest and peace.

This is the gospel. I should only spoil the simplicity of this magnificent thing if I were to add more ; except to pray that the spirit of God may so apply it to our hearts that we may be able each to say, "This day the Lord hath wrought salvation in my heart," to his glory and to your good. Amen.

FAREWELL ADDRESSES.

CHAPTER XII.

SAMUEL'S PARTING WORDS. HIS INTEGRITY AS A JUDGE. TRUE MONUMENTS. THE PEOPLE'S SINS. FORMS OF GOVERNMENT. A MIRACLE.

ALMOST every illustrious hero who appears in the word of God,—not the less illustrious because Christian,—as he retires from the scene of his labours to enter into the rest promised and provided from the foundation of the world, makes a farewell address to those with whom he was associated. Thus did Moses, and Joshua, and thus did Samuel—about to be superseded by a king, himself—as one of the judges, or extraordinary officers, raised up for the preservation of Israel: they retire into the shadow, and make ready for that better, even an eternal rest, the heavenly Canaan. Our blessed Lord, as the great head of all, addresses his disciples in those touching words beginning at John xiv.—“Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.” Paul, when he bids farewell to the presbyters of Ephesus, speaks to them with touching eloquence, and in his epistles he gives hints of his approaching death, and his entrance into the immediate presence of Him *whose cross he had preached, and whose glory*

he had sought. Now, in this very beautiful and very practical farewell address, delivered by Samuel, and made to the children of Israel, he first of all reminds them that he had grown grey in their service—the snows of many years had fallen on his head, and many things gave token that he was approaching that better land where there is immortal youth without the possibility of age, and endless health with no sickness or symptom of decay. “I am old and grey-headed; and behold, my sons are with you;” on whom, however, he does not venture to pronounce a eulogy, knowing that their conduct in sacred things and in reference to the temple had been singularly and painfully flagrant and corrupt. But he says one thing he could appeal to them for a testimony to—“As a judge raised up in the midst of the land, having much in my power, much passing through my hands, great opportunities of enriching myself,” and knowing how prone to nepotism is human nature, and how avaricious those who are placed in trust with great property often are, “I can testify before the Lord and before the king, just anointed now, that I have taken no one’s ox, no one’s ass. Whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe, to blind mine eyes therewith?” and he could appeal to the whole multitude who had been in contact with him, many of whom had blamed him, many of whom had envied his prosperity, many of whom had doubted of the expediency of some of the courses he pursued; yet they were all constrained to own, without one dissentient voice, “Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken *sought of any man’s hand.*” This is the noblest monu-

ment that could be reared to his memory. Of all monuments to great goodness, to illustrious worth, the most lasting are those that live in the hearts, and are sculptured in the memories of them that have been blessed by their liberality and goodness; and the only monument that will survive the ordeal of the grave, and appear in more than the splendour of its first erection at the judgment-seat of Christ, will be that monument which consists of the acknowledgment of the good you have done—"I was in prison, and ye visited me; sick, and ye ministered unto me; I was hungry, and ye fed me; I was naked, and ye clothed me." These are the component parts of a monument to greatness and goodness that angels might envy, but cannot have; that Christians may covet, and even now may put themselves in possession of.

We read that whilst he thus vindicates himself,—and there was no egotism, or vain-glory, or self-praise,—it was that he might publicly retire, and evidence to all, that he had done at least his duty, and that he had not done anything that could leave a stain or a reproach upon his spotless memory. He reminds them, however, whilst he speaks of his own exemption from every charge, that their ingratitude, their forgetfulness of God's goodness, were beyond all expression great: "For the Lord raised up Moses and Aaron, brought your fathers out of the land of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place. And when they forgot the Lord their God, he then sold them into the hand of Sisera: they cried unto the Lord, acknowledged their sins; he interposed and delivered them, raised up judges"—the long succession closing with himself. *But they were so ungrateful, they so little*

appreciated God their King,—for they lived under a theocracy,—that they insisted upon having, like the surrounding nations, a king, with a court, and all the equipage that belongs to it : and God, not altogether in mercy, but in chastisement, gave them the king they asked, but told them of their sin, reminded them of the consequences if they insisted “ Let us have a king ;” and they lived bitterly to repent that they had cast off God, their divine King, and had taken in his place a human one, renouncing what was then God’s selection and consecration, the theocratic form of government under which they had so long and prosperously lived. But still Samuel says, “ Though you have done wrong in this, though God has given you this king, Saul, in chastisement, yet, if you will love God, if you will fear him, if you will obey his commandments, and him also that ruleth over you, then God will still bless you ; but if you will not, then God will make you a monument of his righteous retribution.” Now what do we see here ? That even when nations take to themselves a form of government that may not be the best, yet, if under that form of government they will honour God, and fear him, and serve him, and do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with God, he will bless them. The truth is, it is not a government that makes a nation, it is a nation that makes a government. Under the worst of forms of government—a democracy, for instance—a Christian people will prosper, and extend, and rise : under the best of governments—our own, for instance—a sinful and an unrighteous people will only reap calamities, not blessings. It is upon the inner heart in the sight of God that all depends ; for it is as true to-day as it

was in the days of Solomon, "Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is the ruin of any people."

Samuel, in order to convince them that he was speaking the very words of God, gave them a sign. At the time of the harvest, which took place in the month of June, or in the beginning of July, it did not rain, by special promise; and the record is that it still rarely rains in Palestine at the time of the latter harvest. Now, at this time, for thunder and rain to take place would have been extraordinary; but when it followed the appeal of Samuel, audibly made, and at the instant of that appeal, it was evident that there was a communication between the inspired speaker and the God who sits upon his throne in glory, and therefore proved that Samuel spoke not his own words, but as he was taught and guided by the Holy Spirit of God.

The people then entreat his prayers: he promises these, but reminds them again that no prayers for them will be of any avail as long as flagrant sins are committed by them; and that if, therefore, they wish to have a blessing from on high, they must walk worthy of it; and yet their worthiness would not be the cause of their reception of the blessing; but only that state, and character, and condition of heart and soul, on which God pours down grace, and glory, and every good thing. In other words, fear the Lord, serve him in truth with your heart, be grateful when you consider what great things he has done: but, on the other hand, if you shall do wickedly, no form of government can save you, no prosperity in your nation can save you, no heroism of your defenders—nothing can save a nation that does wickedly.

SAUL'S SELECT BAND.

CHAPTER XIII.

SAUL OFFERS SACRIFICE. EXPEDIENCY. SAMUEL'S REPROOF AND PROPHECY. REASON OF ISRAEL'S DISASTERS. ISRAEL'S DESIRE OF A KING.

FIRST of all we learn from this chapter that Saul, seeking a glory which did not come to him, gathered together a select band of three thousand of the men of Israel. He summoned all the Hebrews, we are told, to meet him at Gilgal, and there to prepare to go to battle against the Philistines, whose garrison had been smitten by Jonathan, his son. We read then of the great multitude of forces that the Philistines brought against the little camp of Israel, as well as of the utterly unprepared state in which the Israelites were, owing to the clever policy which the Philistines had pursued. We read after this that Saul, according to Samuel's appointment, went to Gilgal, where Samuel was to meet him and offer up a sacrifice, which was the function of Samuel, and not of Saul. Saul, however, hasty, and anxious to pacify the people, his own people, and to arm them with greater confidence against the Philistines, took the place of Samuel, which was not his, intruded into a function that did *not belong to him*, and hastily offered up a sacrifice,

knowing that he did wrong in the sight of God. He acted according to that most fatal principle so often, or rather always fatal when divorced from truth and righteousness, expediency: he did not look at the demerit of the act, but at its expediency in the sight of the children of Israel; he violated God's law because of a momentary good impression that he thought would thereby be produced upon the multitude of the children of Israel. Samuel comes to him, we are told, and reproves him for his conduct, explains to him his sins, and gives him the awful warning that the Lord had now taken the kingdom from him—that it would not be established in him, but that in another God would find a king worthy to act under him, and rule over his people Israel.

The bands of Philistines came into the land of Israel, spoiling wherever they had the power; and we learn, in the last place, the subtle and successful policy which the Philistines had pursued in depriving the children of Israel of arms. Now, recollect what the whole of this was the result of. The Israelites were commanded to exterminate a guilty and a debased population in that land. Out of tenderness, as they supposed, man assuming to be more tender than God, they spared them. The consequence was that they became thorns and briars in their sides, corrupting their principles, destroying their property, harassing and tormenting them at morning, noon, and night, till at last many of them learned, if not all, that what men think the cruelty of God would have been in this case the greatest tenderness, and what man thought was his tenderness was really the greatest cruelty. *We have, in the next place, the children of Israel*

insisting on having a king, that they might have all the equipage, and pomp, and splendour of a royal court, in the same manner as surrounding nations. It was not their love of monarchy, but their love of finery that made them seek a king. God had given them judges, and he himself was their king, it being a theocracy : dissatisfied with this, they prayed for a human king. God sent word by Samuel that their prayer in this case should be answered, but that they would find that the answered prayer was far more disastrous than the prayer refused ; and they begin to learn in this chapter, and, as we proceed with the book, in subsequent chapters, that never are judgments so heavy as those which we have asked, thinking they would be blessings, but knowing that we were acting in asking for them contrary to the will and mind of God.

SAUL AND JONATHAN.

CHAPTER XIV.

JONATHAN'S ENTERPRISE. HIS REFLECTIONS. HIS SIGN. SAUL'S
AMAZEMENT AT THE RESULT OF JONATHAN'S ENTERPRISE.
SAUL'S USE OF THE ARK. SAUL'S CURSE. JONATHAN COMES
UNDER SAUL'S CURSE. SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT.

IN this chapter we have a strange mixture—all the lights and shadows of very remarkable human character. In the opening verses we have the bold—one would have called it, had it not succeeded, the rash—attempt of Jonathan to execute the commandment laid upon the children of Israel, in the destruction of the Philistines. We read that he determined to take their garrison by surprise. On this occasion he made the very pious reflection—“It may be that the Lord will work for us; it is his cause, we are on his mission; and it may be that he will work for us; and if he do so, it matters very little whether we be two or two thousand, for God can save by few just as easily as by many.” There is so much of sound faith and of pious sentiment in the words of Jonathan that one can scarcely believe it was a mere rash, youthful exploit which might end in his own destruction, but that it was an instinct, or, what is better still, an inspiration from *on high to go* in God's strength and conquer.

His armour-bearer happened to be a Christian man, very much of his way of thinking, and therefore he said, "Do all that is in thine heart: turn thee; behold I am with thee according to thy heart." We then read that Jonathan had either some presentiment or direct inspiration from God that a certain expression used by the Philistines would be to him the signal and the prophecy of success; but if another sort of expression was used, that then it would be his duty to be cautious, to lie in ambush, and to wait for a more favourable opportunity. The very thing that was to be a token of success occurred: he climbed up the rugged rocks with his armour-bearer, rushed among the Philistines, and no doubt the human cause of their discomfiture was this, that they thought these were but the leaders—it being probably a dark night, when they were the least expecting such an assault—merely the advanced guard of a powerful host: they were taken by surprise, and in their confusion, the excitement of passion, and the darkness of the night, these Philistines, mixed up with renegade Hebrews, fell upon one another, and did the work which Saul's army should have done, in the confusion and excitement of the moment.

While all this was taking place, Saul saw the hosts of the Philistines dissolving like snow-flakes upon a stream, and he wondered what could be the cause of such an extraordinary commotion amongst them. The plan he adopted was to number his own host, being about six hundred men in all, and to see who were missing, that it might be ascertained if the victory was owing to the heroism of any of his troops, or to *some other interposition*. Saul found that only Jona-

than, his son, and his armour-bearer were absent, and therefore that these two youths must be committing the havoc, and securing the victory which was now so indisputable.

After this comes out the cruelty of Saul. He was evidently a tyrant, full of passion, selfishness, caprice; and all the poor people that were subject to him felt it more and more. On a former occasion he would not wait for Samuel to offer up sacrifice; he was so impetuous and impatient that he would offer it himself. On this occasion he sends for the ark of the Lord, though he had not taken Samuel's advice; thinking it was a sort of charm, or exorcism: he thought it would be with him, and would enable him to follow up the victory that had been begun, and would lead to still more glorious victories that were yet to be. But even here his passion got the better of him; for the moment it was said that the noise in the host of the Philistines went on, then he said to the priest, "Withdraw thine hand;" that is, "We do not want religion any more; I only sent for the token of religion in order to answer a purpose; and now that I see the purpose is being accomplished without God, I do not want religion any more." He was a man that embraced religion to do him a turn, to help him in his own selfish purposes.

We read after this that the renegade Hebrews, who had been taken prisoners by the foraging parties of the Philistines, and were within the citadel, joined their own countrymen, as they ought to have done, and fought also against the Philistines. Then Saul, still full of passion and caprice, is so delighted with *the victory, and so determined to make a complete*

massacre of the Philistines, that lest any of his soldiers should stop by the way, he pronounces a solemn curse, which neither the king nor the high priest could pronounce, upon any one Israelite who should stop to eat a morsel of food, or to drink a cup of water, until the Philistines were utterly destroyed. He forgot, in his passion, that flesh and blood needs food; and that the very worst way to complete the victory was to prevent the people eating what would enable them to do it. It was the tyrant pronouncing a curse where no curse ought to have been pronounced.

The people smote the Philistines, and killed their oxen and their sheep, and roasted them; but we read that they did what was forbidden to an Israelite—they ate the blood with the flesh of the animal slain, and so far sinned. Before this, however, Jonathan, who had won so magnificent a victory, dipped his rod, or his spear, into a honeycomb suspended from a tree, and ate a little of it. In Palestine, pronounced to be a land overflowing with milk and honey, the bees build their cells on the branches of trees; and very often there may be seen their own beautiful structure filled with honey, hanging from a branch of a tree, or in the hollow of a trunk, or under a rock, or some other equally convenient place. And seeing it, Jonathan, very naturally, very properly, and without the least sin,—for he did not know his father's oath, and if he had, it was a wrong one,—tasted the honey; and then he made the remark that his eyes were enlightened. This is a common eastern phrase; I am told a Hindoo will still say, when he has got food after being very hungry, "It has enlightened my eyes;" that is, "It *has strengthened* me; it has put me on my feet, as we

should say, and enabled me to do the work that was assigned me."

Saul began to find that the people were not so ready to obey him as they had been, evidently on account of his own violent passion and caprice; and therefore he had lots drawn to see who of his people were in fault; and, finally, whether he or Jonathan was in fault. The people were evidently beginning to detach themselves from him, disgusted with the meaningless despotism which he exercised on this occasion. I was reading lately some remarks made by the Emperor of Russia to one who is now the head of the great American Republic. The emperor said there were but two perfect governments upon earth,—his own, an absolute despotism, and that of America, which is a pure republic. I think if any one will read this book of Samuel they will see that absolute despotisms are not to be trusted, and that the crowd is not to be trusted; and therefore, we Britons should be very thankful that we have all the good of the Czar's despotism and all the freedom of American republicanism combined. Certainly, a despot is the best of all governors, if he be a perfect man; and, no doubt, a republic would equally be so, if it were governed by perfect men. But whether you look into the Kremlin in Russia, or into the Congress in America, you will not see a perfect emperor in the one nor a perfect senator in the other, as all history too truly testifies. And therefore, in this fallen world, the best way of government is never to lodge too much power in one man, nor to spread it over too many; but to try and have that happy combination of checks, and balances, and duty, and personal attachment, which, *after all*, will make countries most blessed,

especially when real religion is the atmosphere that pervades it all.

Saul went up from following the Philistines, and took the kingdom over Israel. We read of his sons and his daughters, and parentage; and very soon we shall read of the Lord having done with him; and so we shall find that Israel, who sought a king against God's command, and got a king by God's permission, soon found it necessary to repent of it, and then wish also he were anywhere but upon the throne that they had erected for him.

Full of practical lessons is this blessed book; useful to nations, useful to individuals: a book for all people, for all countries, for all climates—the inspiration of God.

SURE DIRECTION.

CHAPTER XIV.

“And Saul asked counsel of God.”—1 SAMUEL xiv. 37.

IN this, at least, he did perfectly right. Whatever were the sins of Saul, this was not one of them; and if he had asked counsel oftener of his God, and listened less to the dictates of his passions, he would have reigned a more popular monarch, and he would have lived a far happier man. I take these words, however, not in order to illustrate his character, but to find a precedent for us in one solitary trait of that tyrant's character which we may imitate. To ask counsel of the Lord is the best text, the most practical direction, for years to come. How rapid is the succession of the years! Ten years ago seem but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night. Nor are we ourselves unaffected by the lapse of time. Our minds, our intellects, our hearts, our sensibilities, are as much affected by the rush of the years over us, as the hair of our heads—as the countenance itself; or the strength, and vigour, and structure of our physical economy. We are all undergoing successive changes, because in a fallen world, and under the unrepealed sentence, “Thou shalt die.” And when we look back *again on another point of view*, what changes

have taken place in all our relationships during the past years! There is no family that has not undergone change; it may be trivial, but it is real. In some cases, hearts that were bounding last year are broken on this; faces that crossed your threshold, and reflected on the home bright sunshine, are in some instances hidden in the shadow of the tomb; separations have occurred in others that may possibly never be repaired; changes have taken place in ties that have been dissolved, in friendships that may be broken, in affections that may be torn, in losses that may be felt. What a history—shall I say tragedy—is every year! what an impressive lesson does it teach in its lapse! and of all lessons not the least precious, “Teach us, O God, so to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

But in turning these words to practical account, let us remember there are two ways, looking to either of which we ought to ask counsel of the Lord. If we take a retrospect of all that has happened in the past, we shall need counsel from God in order rightly to explain it; if we look forward into all the unfilled scenes of the future, we shall equally need counsel from God to direct and guide us. In looking back, has not recent years—not to refer to their predecessors—presented to us all, on the broad and public platform of the world, strange, startling moral phenomena? Who can doubt it? One is sick at heart as we read of the dishonesty, the iniquity, the suicides, the murders, the violation of all duties, the breach of all obligations, by which not only our commerce, but our character as a nation, has been recently stained. What *an evidence* that no outward reforms can touch the

real seat of mischief! Do you need the explanation of it? It is as old as the day when God's word was first committed to man's writing: "The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Neither our reformatory institutions, nor our ragged schools, with all their excellence, can really and truly change the heart of man: these may be blessed—both may be useful; but grace alone can transform the heart. In reference to criminals, I cannot but think there prevails a very unhealthy feeling among many; there seems to be great compassion for a man who has knocked down an unhappy victim, and robbed and plundered him; and a great effort to reform him, and much sentimentality expressed about him: but the poor ragged children, thousands of whom I could gather out of Wild Street in Drury Lane, seem to come in for very little of that sympathy. I think if we had less sentimental sympathy with the rogues—the Sepoys they may be called—of Christendom, and far deeper sympathy with the honest man's children, left to wander at large without a mother's, or a friend's, or a teacher's care, we should contribute more substantially to the moral elevation and grandeur of our native land. By all means bring the sinner to repentance; by all means teach him the greatness of his sins, and tell him of a Saviour's forgiveness; but at the same time do not expend upon him that sympathy, that compassion which the neglected poor most instantly, urgently, and imperatively demand.

Have not recent years been to the whole world years of uncertainty and trials? Who can fail to recognise the fulfilment of the Saviour's words?—
"Wars, rumours of wars, pestilences, earthquakes,

signs in the sun and in the moon, perplexity, distress of nations; men's hearts failing them for fear of the things that are coming on the earth." Who, reading of India and its tragedies, can fail to see many of these things coming to pass? What a monetary crisis has America been passing through!—what anxiety on our own Exchange! But what is our duty? When we see these things come to pass, what are we to do? Every one leave his duty, give up his warehouse, abandon his profession? No; but "lift up your hearts, for your redemption draweth nigh." We had scarcely closed, if closed it can be called, a war of the most desolating character in the Crimea, before wars—as if some combustible element were scattered throughout the whole earth—threatened to explode in distant China, in Italy and Switzerland; in Persia war raged: in India it is indiscriminate massacre. Amid fine speeches and professions, there is not a monarch in Christendom whose hand is not near or on his sword's hilt, and scarce an army upon the great continent that is not waiting for the order to march into the battle-field. All these things are very solemnizing, and indicate the remarkable epoch in which we are placed, and are to be met only by seeking counsel of Him who has told us that there never will be over the earth a universal peace till there shall be swayed over its length and breadth the sceptre of Him who is the Prince of peace, and who came once to be crucified that we might be crowned, and will come again to be crowned, that in the splendour of that crown we may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Have we experienced in the past dispensations that

are mysteries, but so startling, that they will continue for ever memories, the meaning of which you cannot explain, the recollection of which is indelible? What family is there that has not a something in its history in the past which it laments, or deploras, or regrets, but cannot explain the why, the wherefore, the meaning, and the mission of? Ask counsel of God, and he will tell you, "I will lead the blind by a way they know not." And when you are puzzled to the utmost, and your feet stumble, and, like David, you are almost tempted to deny the existence and the agency of a God, hear sounding from the Saviour's lips the precious words, "What I do"—"I do," not chance, not accident—"what I do thou knowest not now," and therefore you must be content, "but thou shalt know hereafter," therefore you must be happy and hopeful. Has the past year been to you a season of painful and bitter bereavement? and I have seen recently more of the weeds of mourning than during many a year that has passed. Do I address any family, therefore, that has lost the near, and the dear, and the beloved—father, mother, husband, wife, son, daughter? and does the recollection lie upon the heart, cold and heavy, like an avalanche, seemingly hopeless and irremovable? It is useless to dwell upon the past—it is useless to regret what was not your doing; it is duty, it is happiness, it is comfort to say, even in the recollection of the dead, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." And it is a happy thought that the lost to us are gained to Christ—absent from the body is present with the Lord; one tie less you have to bind you to this world, one tie more to knit

you and draw you to the happier and the better world. Whatever the trial may be, whatever the loss may be, for you it should teach this lesson—"What son, what daughter, is there whom the Lord chasteneth not? If ye were without chastisement, ye would not be sons." If we never had a shadow, we should worship the sunshine instead of God; if we never had trials, we should say, "This is our rest!" and we should try to anticipate heaven. If all went ceaselessly smooth, without the least obstruction, or opposition, or divergence, as we could wish it, we should cease to remember that tents are for time—tabernacles and many mansions are only in the world to come. Whatever, then, may have been the nature of the past to you, however inexplicable or however painful,—delightful thought!—God was in it—not only God, but a Father was in it. We cannot recall the past, but we can pray for forgiveness of it; we cannot bring back the dead from their resting-place, but we can pray for patience, resignation, trust in God, hope of a happy and a never to be dissolved reunion hereafter.

As the past cannot be recalled, it becomes us to look into the future we have now to face. I have spoken of the past, with all its lights and its shadows, with all its fugitive and its mixed occurrences; let us now look into the future. First of all, let me entreat you to ask counsel of God first in his word, and next by prayer for direction concerning it, in reference to this great question, each individual for himself, "Why am I here? What is the meaning of my presence in the midst of this world? Am I a mere piece of drift-wood tossed by the waves, and borne by the currents I know not *and care not* whither? or am I here for some end of

beneficence, of mercy, or of love?" You find, even in this world, what may teach you: every creature is fitted to the element in which you find it moving—the fish for the water, the bird for the air, and the camel for the desert, and the ox for browsing in the meadow—each creature has an organization adapted to the end of its existence. Take man, and the same law will instantly strike you: you see a creature with exquisite organization that fits him for this world; but you see in the midst of that exquisite organization soaring thoughts, brilliant hopes, magnificent conceptions, moral sensibilities, conscience, fear, joy, capabilities illimitable, capacities that nothing on earth can fill. What does this teach us? That man is made for time so far, but that he has within him all the evidences that he is made for a loftier and a more glorious sphere beyond it. Were you to find the bird, the beautiful bird of paradise in a ditch, or the eagle plunging amid reptiles in a quagmire, you would instantly conclude they were where they were not meant to be, and you would try to extricate them. God gives this counsel about us. If you find man burying his heart in the world, digging its mines for gold, clutching at silver and riches all the day, at any sacrifice, and in spite of any toil, while he has within him such thoughts, hopes, and capacities as I have alluded to, not allowing them to have scope and verge, but crushing and cramping them, and imprisoning them in this body of clay, what is our duty? If we are guided by God's counsel, we must try to stir you up to nobler feelings, to loftier thoughts, to far brighter and more enduring anticipations. *The bird for the air, the eagle for his eyrie, the*

angel for his service; man for his God, his eternal home, his exceeding great and unspeakable reward. The chief end of man is not to make money, and the chief happiness of man does not consist in making money. Do not misunderstand me; the desire to have property is not sinful: it is not the men that have money, but the men that love money, that fall into divers snares that drown men in destruction and in perdition. That man who sets his heart upon it, who excludes the wakening thought, who keeps God out of his counting-house, but will admit him into the sanctuary; who wishes to have no religion in business, just as he wishes to have very little business in religion—such a man surely is not living up to the grandeur of his position—surely such a one is not treading the level that God has assigned him. Forget not that the happiest, the richest, the greatest, is but a traveller along a hard, weary, dusty road, that his home is not yet reached; and you are not to settle down upon the road, but to scatter as you go as many blessings as you can, and to lift your heart, and treasure, and hope to that better world that is yet to be. In the second place, if this be our position, let me ask what is our mission? if we be Christians, what is our mission upon earth? what has the Master commanded us to do? Here is the very first duty—the man that has most, and the man that has least, if truly Christian, will lay all that he has in his bank, in his shop, in his warehouse, on the ocean, in distant lands—at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, and say unto him, “Lord, this is thine; thou gavest it to me; if it be thy will that I should use it thus, I am ready; if it be thy command that I should use it otherwise, I am equally ready.

I desire to lay it all before thee on this day, and to be prepared and willing to do with it whatever thou in thy providence shalt appoint, and by thy grace shalt inspire into my heart:" for it is one of the very first conditions of the Cross, "If any man be not prepared to leave father and mother, and sister and brother, and houses and lands, he cannot be my disciple."

Now mark these words. I do not mean you are to go and cast all you have into a convent, which would be the worst misappropriation of all; but I do mean to say that every Christian is bound to look at all that he has in the light of Christ's holy will, and to be ready to use it for his glory. When the Romans conquered a nation, the first thing they required of that nation was that they should lay everything at their feet; and the very first thing they said to them was, "Do you deliver into the hands of the people of Rome your fields, your temples, your property—all that is yours?" The answer of the nation conquered was, "We deliver all." The reply was, "Then you are entitled to the protection and the dignity of the Roman people." Now our blessed Lord says to you, "You must, on becoming my disciple, lay all at my feet, submit all to my disposal." You must open the Bible, bow the knee, and pray that Christ would show you what you ought to do; and his counsel, if heard by us, will, I suspect, lead us to make future arrangements different from any we have made in the years that are past. We hear in the present day a great deal of quarrelling about consecrated burial-grounds, about consecrated churches, and consecrated chapels. What we want no less is *consecration in another quarter*. The devil will

be quite delighted that you should quarrel about consecrated buildings and consecrated burial-grounds, if he can only prevent you consecrating what is God's property, entrusted to you as a steward for his glory and for the good of mankind. In the present day we have plenty of consecrated churches, plenty of consecrated chapels; but what is wanted, what Christianity demands, is consecrated banks, consecrated warehouses, consecrated shops, and consecrated purses,—for these are the things that specially need consecration, and are kept by us as if they were profane. Men speak and quarrel about consecrated persons. A consecrated bishop may be a very good thing,—in the estimate of many, a very necessary thing; but I think a character more wanted, and a character far nobler, is a consecrated merchant, a consecrated banker, a consecrated tradesman; everybody consecrated who has anything from Christ's hand that can prove a blessing to any of Christ's people. Most of you would shrink with perfect horror from touching the property of an employer; but do not some of you—the most honest, the most honourable, the most upright—sometimes forget that what you have, however little or however much, is not yours; it is the Master's, and you are but stewards. How shall you give account of a stewardship which has wasted as its own that which was committed to it as a trust only, for the use and the honour of your Great Master, and the good of them to whom to give a cup of cold water is to hear the beautiful commendation—“Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me?” All the property in your banks, all the property in your

estates, all your working capital, is Christ's; you are stewards entrusted with it; and he will either take the property from you, and put it into hands that will make a better use of it, or he will summon you from the property, and say, "Give an account of thy stewardship." Make the calculation—I put it without finding fault, for if you have anything beyond what meets your necessities, you are, in God's sight, rich;—make the calculation, and say, "I have laid out in 1857 so much for enjoyment, so much in sights, in wine, in my drawing-room, in my dining-room; I have spent so much at the perfumer's, spent so much somewhere else:" and now I will put upon the other side, "I have spent so much to aid the charity schools, to promote Christian education, to help some pious missionary, to do good in some shape to the cause of Christ, or to the claims of Christ, or to the people that are Christ's." It would be a most useful thing to put all that down. I have often been told that by keeping an account of what one spends one becomes more economical: I am quite sure that by keeping a comparative account of what one has spent for Christ, and what one has spent not in sheer necessities, but in luxuries, we shall be constrained to say, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight no man living can be justified; and oh, give me grace to act henceforth more worthy of thee."

I have read in an interesting work, that that extraordinary man, Oliver Cromwell, in the meridian of his power, paid a visit to that magnificent creation of human genius, York Minster. On *walking into the minster*, he saw twelve figures in

niches, each of solid and pure silver. He asked, in his own bluff and rude manner, which I do not justify "Who are those twelve fellows in those niches?" The answer of the devout verger—for he seems to have been either a Roman Catholic or something very like it—was, "These are the twelve holy apostles." Oliver Cromwell instantly replied, "I read that the apostles, like their Master, went about doing good. Take down these twelve, melt them, turn them into coins, and let them go through the length and breadth of the land, with a commission from my treasury, doing good to the souls and bodies of mankind." Now from this incident, in the experience of that bluff soldier, we, without justifying the mode in which he expressed himself, may learn a lesson. Have you no silver images, have you no stored and treasure-idols in your home, that might, without very much injury to yourself, be melted into currency, and sent round the wide world on errands of beneficence, of mercy, and of goodness? I think if each would inquire, and would seek counsel from God, where and what he is, he would soon be able to decide. At all events, whether you take that lesson or not, this is true, "Whosoever forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple." What a strong expression! "If any man hate not father, and mother, an wife, and child, he cannot be my disciple;" that is to say, unless you prefer my claims to all the attractions of gold, to all the pretensions of estate, to all the endearments of home, you cannot be my disciple. I do not constitute the test; I leave it for you. And in speaking of your liberality in the past, I cannot but *also notice* that all thanks for favours received, ought

to be always hints and incentives to greater favours still. In connection with this church, we are carrying on works of great usefulness; the congregation is not formed from the neighbourhood, but we owe a debt to the neighbourhood. We have day-schools, on which are expended some £500 a year; we have also ragged schools; we have raised nearly £1200 for re-building them, the old schools having fallen down about our ears. Some one may assist us here. Then we have had this year a most excellent missionary labourer, who goes to the parents of our children, overlooks our schools, prays with the sick and destitute, and preaches in the Ragged Church. This excellent missionary labourer, who is doing great good, as the committees of our schools will inform you, has been of service to us; he has no income of his own, we are obliged to raise one for him. Let me ask some rich merchant, or some nobleman, who has plenty, if he has any of Oliver Cromwell's silver images at home, to melt down one. And let me remind you, that the eleven you retain—I do not ask you to give up the whole—will not give you half the delight that you receive from the one that you melt into currency in Wild Street or Drury Lane, leaving there as it will streams of beneficence, and goodness, and love. But some one will say, perhaps, "After all that you have told us in reference to our duties to the Saviour, we have done all that we reasonably could." I answer, if any one can say that, the Saviour's benediction is upon you—"He hath done what he could." Some one may say, "I have given all that I can conveniently spare." But is your convenience the standard of duty, or is there *any such limitation* in the sacred oracle?

Another one will tell me, perhaps, "I give always what is customary." But who fixed the custom? Not the Master, not the Bible; but a world that is always on the wrong side. And if you want the motive that should sustain you in all that you do, I give it you—"He that was rich for our sakes became poor; that we through his poverty might be made rich." Now I know no duty that more devolves upon Christians hearing constantly this precious gospel, than the duty of increased liberality. I am quite sure that if you will reflect, you will take in good part what is surely a very practical lecture; but only a practical discourse if there be practical responses to it.

I will ask you,—to seek counsel from God's word to guide you in the future. First, it must have been observed, that all men seem at this moment to be rapidly, recklessly rushing in order to be rich, making haste to be rich; and in order to do so, what is the result? Not only do they ruin their own souls, but they are exacting, from those that are beneath them, excessive labour on the one hand; and, on the other hand, the worn out, and exhausted, have recourse here to fraud, there to intemperance, somewhere else to scenes, and sins, and resources, that injure them in this world, and in that to come. I do not blame so much the employers, against whom it has been the custom to level very severe censure; but I blame the buyers. Depend upon it, if those that buy, did not themselves indulge in what are called late hours, and in intolerable exactions, the employers—who have an interest in the well-being of those beneath them—would be as ready as any to give way, and yield.

I do submit that it would be much better to go to

church in an old-fashioned or a half-worn-out robe, than to have the terrible recollection that some poor young woman—as noble, as tender, as susceptible in her feelings as you are—has been working till two o'clock on Lord's day morning in order that you might appear in a new one. No prayers, no alms, no professions, are any atonement for this. God prefers mercy to sacrifice; and to undo heavy burdens is better than fasting. It is absurd for us to contend for the sanctity of the Sabbath if we do such things. If you will ask, therefore, counsel from God, you will not insist upon what you order being executed too speedily, you will bear and forbear—you will feel in all its force that law that, like the law of gravitation, ought to regulate social intercourse—"What ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them."

There is another lesson. It is this—the way to be happy in 1858 is to find something good to do. What is one reason that you meet with some Christians who complain, and fret, and are depressed with the feeling that God has forsaken them? The true secret of their disquiet is, that they have in some shape forsaken God. And you may depend upon it, wherever a true Christian stores up all in himself, and gives out nothing for others—wherever he becomes a vortex, absorbing all, instead of a fountain, ever playing forth upon all—he will become unhappy. Howard, the celebrated philanthropist, most admirably said,—“Set about doing good to somebody; put on your hat, and go and find the needy, the sick, the poor, the suffering, the destitute; inquire into their wants; seek out the desolate and oppressed, and tell them of consolation and of a *Saviour*,” and by doing so you will find a re-

action, a reflex operation; you will find your happiness increase as your beneficence spreads and extends. Whoever wishes, during 1858, to enjoy most of the dainties of the Gospel, let him go forth, and carry out the greatest amount of the duties of the Gospel, thus you will find your enjoyments will multiply as your duties increase, and diffuse good around you.

Seek counsel that you may have the greatest repose in the retrospect of the past; seek counsel from God, and search for it in his word, that you may have right direction for the year 1858, still to the greatest extent future. Thus taught of God, thus directed by his word, the Church of Christ will never want means of spreading, schools will not languish, missions will not die, neighbourhoods will not become seed-plots of crime and criminals, but we shall bless and reap blessings, and realise the happiness, the luxury, that springs from that beautiful sentiment—"It is more blessed to give than it is to receive."

May God give us this counsel, and to his name be praise and glory. Amen.

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS.

CHAPTER XV.

SAUL'S DUTY. NATIONAL SIN. SAUL'S SIN. GOD REPENTS. SAUL'S
VACILLATION AND HYPOCRISY. SAUL'S CONFESSION. AGAG
SLAIN.

FIRST of all you will learn in this chapter that Samuel, acting as the inspired prophet of the Most High, sent Saul with an express commission, without any exception or limitation, to destroy all the nation of Amalek. God remembered against Amalek their opposition to his own people when they passed through the desert, and he still remembered the solemn obligation which lay upon every Israelite to exterminate, as I have often mentioned, all the Canaanites, with all their branches, from the whole land of Israel. Saul set out with all his troops professedly to execute the commandment of God ; but we read that he made one exception in favour of the Kenites, and on a ground perfectly legitimate—that they showed kindness to the children of Israel when they needed that kindness, and therefore the Kenites departed and separated themselves from the Amalekites. Now, you notice in this part of the chapter two great facts—namely, national retribution for national sin. The Amalekites had sinned grievously *in the past*, and to present judgments,

which they shared with the rest of the Canaanites, were superadded special retributions for special national sins. The Kenites, on the other hand, another tribe in the land, who had showed kindness to Israel, and done what was nationally good, are now nationally remembered, and spared the judgments that were immediately to fall upon the Amalekites.

Saul, we read, gained the victory; he took Agag, the king of the Amalekites, captive; he destroyed the people, as he was commanded, with the edge of the sword—a destruction, it is always important to recollect, not the result of personal spite, but the retribution judicially inflicted by the Judge of all the earth because of crimes committed in the sight of all men. It appears that when Saul had thus conquered, and so far executed the commission of God, he took the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and only consumed the refuse, and also spared Agag, very probably as a captive king to grace the procession of a victorious general. This was contrary to God's command, and it shows the avarice and covetousness of Saul interfering with his duty and obligation to his God; and, like every personal interference with a great and solemn obligation, it is visited with corresponding and just retribution. The word of the Lord came to Samuel, and the first thing that God tells Samuel is, "It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king," looking down at all he was doing and had done. This remark has been made the ground of objection against the inspiration of the sacred penman, on the very plausible plea that we cannot conceive a perfectly wise, perfectly just, perfectly holy being to repent. The first answer that we

make is that the sacred penman must have clearly understood the meaning that he attached to this phrase, because in the very same chapter the same sacred penman records the sentiment, "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for he is not a man, that he should repent." Now, it is quite clear, therefore, to take the lowest ground, it could not be—speaking to those that object—an incidental mistake, because the same penman who states twice in this chapter that God repented he had made Saul king, states with as great explicitness that repentance is a thing altogether alien to a perfect, a just, and a holy God. Then, how do you explain what seems contradictory? I answer, it is evident that repentance in the sense in which a sinner repents of the wrong he has done, and returns to the right, cannot be predicated of God, for he is not a man, it says here, that he should repent. Then what does it imply? Not that God has altered his plan, or retraced his steps, or modified his purposes, but that he alters and changes the outward development of these in the midst of mankind and before the world. Repentance as applicable to us is change of thought, change of feeling, followed by change of conduct; repentance as applicable to God is no change of purpose, but simply an alteration of the outward course that he adopts in carrying out those purposes. God, therefore, is said in verse eleven to repent merely in the sense that he changes the plan that he had been pursuing, and always designed and meant to do. So it is figuratively applied to him again—repentance—in verse twenty-nine in its strict sense; and God is there said not to be a man, *that he should be capable of what is only*

peculiar to a man, or a moral and responsible being—the feeling of repentance or sorrow for sin.

We read that when Samuel came to Saul, according to God's direction, Saul, evidently conscious in himself that he had done wrong—for Saul is a specimen of a vacillating despot—of a man who takes as much religion as will suit his purpose, and casts away the rest, and is religious and irreligious, pious and impious, by turns, and according to convenience, and as it suits his own objects, and yet is never happy—spoke like a saint, and said, "Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord." There was no doubt a portion of truth in it, for he had done part; there was also untruth in it, for he had omitted to do what God commanded. Samuel, speaking not by inspiration, but from his own observation, instantly said,—“If, then, you have thus fulfilled the commandment of God, you will perhaps be able to explain to me what means this bleating of sheep in mine ears, and this lowing of oxen? Where do they come from? how do you account for them?” Saul, ever ready to make an answer at any sacrifice, said not, “I have saved them,” as he ought to have done,—for it says in the ninth verse that Saul and the people spared them,—but he said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites,” casting the blame off his own shoulders, like our great forefathers, and laying it upon the shoulders of his subjects, unfairly and unjustly, “for,” he says, “the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen.” No doubt there was truth in that, for the people did truly spare them; but was not Saul, as their king, responsible for commanding or permitting them *to do so*? The admiral of a fleet is responsible for all

under him ; the general of an army is responsible for all under him ; the shortcomings of an army are visited on its head ; and Saul, being the responsible party, ought never with a cowardly spirit—as cowardly as it was untrue—to have laid the whole blame upon the people or his army, instead of sharing in the blame himself. And then Saul also said,—“The people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen not to gratify my avarice, but to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God.” He colours his dishonesty over with religion and piety, and a desire to honour God. Then Samuel said,—“Stop, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me this night. When thou wast little in thine own sight, the Lord anointed thee king over Israel ; when very humble, he consecrated you, and made you very great ; but when he asked you, after he had thus exalted you, to go and fulfil duty, then you halted and faltered in the midst of it.” Saul said,—“I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me ; and as evidence of it, I have brought Agag, the King of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.” But, he adds, exculpating himself,—“But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal.” You see a mixture here of religion, of dishonesty, of untruth ; in short, he was a man who had no religion, and only used it so far as it subserved his own selfish and despotic purposes.

Samuel answers beautifully and justly, in one of those verses which never can be forgotten, and which point out the grandeur of this blessed book,—

“Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Instead of thinking that your sparing the cattle for sacrifice exculpates your disobeying God’s word, you ought to have recollected that moral duties are first, ceremonial are next.” Any man that makes religion a pretext for dishonesty in business, or the worship of God a reason for neglecting his duties to his brethren of mankind, reasons like Saul, and forgets the sublime sentiment of Samuel—that God has more delight in moral obedience than he has in ceremonial or ecclesiastical sacrifices.

Then Saul said unto Samuel, when he heard it, —“I have sinned”—a confession, however, rather extorted than spontaneous. And then he turns to Samuel, and asks pardon from him, who could not give it,—“Pardon my sin!” and he asks him to return with him to worship the Lord. Samuel said not “I will pardon thy sin,” for he had not the power to do so, but, “I will not return with thee, for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel. And as Samuel turned about to go away, Saul laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him, The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou.” “God will not repent, for he is not a man, that he shall repent.” Saul again confessed his sin, and implored Samuel to pray for him; but Samuel, to show that obedience was better than sacrifice, brought Agag, King of the Amalekites, before him, and, in language still applied to war, “*hewed him in pieces.*” We read of an army being

cut to pieces; that does not mean literally that each soldier was cut to pieces, but that the army was demoralised, disorganized, broken, scattered: so here it is said Agag was cut to pieces—that is, he was utterly destroyed. And the judgment was as just as it was immediate, for it is stated,—“Thou hast made women childless; thou hast been a cruel monster; thy mother shall also be childless now;” or, with what measure thou hast meted, it shall now be meted out to thee.

Saul is simply an ancient type of that strange mixture of good and evil which still marks the character of man. Light and shade, conscience and convenience, selfishness and sacrifice, so actuate and influence by turns, that we are perplexed and puzzled in what terms to describe so inexplicable and inconsistent a phenomenon. It seems, at times, as if the angel and the brute struggled for supremacy in human nature. All this points to an aboriginal state of perfection, and to a subsequent catastrophe that has marred all. Sin is the great disturbing force, and to its action we are to attribute very much that we now find in our fallen condition. In fact, if we refuse the history of the fall—if we deny the deteriorating and destructive effects which have followed and sprung from that great primal apostacy—if we believe that every babe born into our world is pure, and as receptive of good as of evil, and as disposed to the one as to the other, we are plunged in confusion worse confounded. We are in a labyrinth without a guiding thread or an illuminating light. I believe that many of the biographies delineated so minutely in sacred scripture are designed to enforce *and illustrate* the extent to which sin has

infected the heart, and conscience, and moral nature of the human race.

Blessed be God the infection can be met and mastered by a glorious antidote. Jesus died for sinners. "His blood cleanseth from all sin." The Holy Spirit renews the heart, and repairs the ruins of our fall.

DAVID ELECTED KING.

CHAPTER XVI.

RECAPITULATION. SAUL'S RETIRING INTO SHADOW. DAVID SELECTED. SAMUEL'S VACILLATION. SAMUEL'S PEACEABLE ERRAND. SAMUEL'S MISTAKE. DAVID ANOINTED AND SANCTIFIED. SAUL FORSAKEN.

THE Israelites had insisted upon abolishing what had been a pure theocracy, or a government by the immediate presence and speaking of God, and on having a temporal ruler, or a king, like the rest of the surrounding nations. God gave them what they asked for, not in mercy—as he told them—but in just and righteous retribution; and he warned them that the king he gave them would not be a blessing, but a calamity and a curse. The first king, selected by God's permission, was Saul; he was anointed and set apart to his kingly office by Samuel, the prophet of the Lord. We have read the history of Saul, at least a large portion of it; and we have seen in the previous chapter what a combination of temper, of passion, of disregard of truth, of rebellion in his heart against God, of trouble and affliction to his people, was this same Saul, the monarch of their own choice.

It appears that God gave notice to Samuel that Saul's *sovereignty must cease*; and that another more

worthy of the throne, as he afterwards proved in all respects, must occupy his place. In order to make this change, Samuel is instructed by God to go and fill his horn with the anointing oil, and to anoint the son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, the youngest son, whom God had chosen for all the dignities and duties of the throne of Israel. God remonstrated with Samuel for mourning over the deposition of the king that he himself had consecrated, and told him that instead of mourning for what could not be altered, he would do far better to go and fulfil the duties that were now enjoined. No grief for losses we have sustained must in the least interfere with duties that still devolve upon us; we are here not to sorrow as those that have no hope, but, rejoicing in the mercy and trusting in the goodness of Him who doeth all things in love, to build up our souls for those great duties, for those solemn obligations, and those large responsibilities which open out to every enlightened Christian mind.

Samuel, evidently becoming timid as he grew older, said, "How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me." He ought never to have made such a remark—whenever we see a duty clear, we are not to hesitate at once to fulfil it; if a duty be commanded in this book, or if a duty occurs in the providence of God, however arduous or difficult, our first thing is to ascertain clearly it is duty, and our next with all our hearts, without fear, without vacillation, without the least divergence to the right or to the left, to go forward and fulfil it; and when men act in this way, the eye is single, and the whole body becomes full of light. Do what is wrong, and all things will cross you; do what *is right*, and heaven and earth will encompass you to

justify you. "And the Lord said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show thee what thou shalt do. And Samuel did that which the Lord spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming,"—thinking that some great judgment was now to fall upon them,— "and said, Comest thou peaceably? And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord; sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice." Jesse was the grandchild of Ruth the Moabitess, of whom we have read in a previous book. And when Samuel looked upon Eliab, he was disposed to think, in his ignorance, "This must be the sovereign designate of Israel—this must be the personage I am called upon to anoint." But the Lord said, "No; look not on his countenance, nor upon the height of his stature"—these are matters of no merit, these are intrinsically possessed of no excellence—"because I have refused him; for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." It is neither rank, nor riches, nor dignity, nor power, nor physical stature—it is none of the extrinsic and circumstantial accompaniments of man that are of any value in the sight of God; he judges not by what the countenance looks, but how the heart beats: God looks within, and determines character from inspection there; man is too prone to look outside, and test excellence by what appears to be there. The body is not the man,—it is but the case, or the tent, it is but the *outer mechanism* that communicates with an

outer world : the man is what thinks, loves, judges, fears, concludes ; and the man not only lives when disentangled from the outward machinery by which he communicates with this present world, but his action is the more vigorous, his powers the less fettered, his capacities of greatness, of progress, and of excellence enlarged to infinite extent.

Jesse called another son, in fact, Samuel went over seven of these sons, and not one of them was the sovereign designate. "Then Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children?" And he told him that he had another, but implied that he did not think it worth while to bring him, as it was impossible he could be the personage Samuel was seeking, forgetting that the Lord seeth not as man seeth ; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. Then David was brought ; "and he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him ; for this is he." Then Samuel did so ; "and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah."

Then we read that "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul ; and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." That the first is strictly the Spirit of the Lord is true, but that the evil spirit from the Lord was a demoniac possession is doubtful. Probably it means an evil passion, an evil temper ; God permitted it in order that he might feel what he was, on whom he depended, and to whom he ought in his previous life to have given all the praise and the glory. But whether this was melancholy, or distress of mind, or remorse, or grief, or literally a fallen spirit, it is plain

that the means of soothing and composing him was music; this would show that it must have been merely a disease of the body, and not of the mind. We are all very prone, I believe, to attribute to the mind what belongs to the body. There are those delicate and sensitive things, more delicate and sensitive than harp-strings—nerves which connect the body with the mind: anything touching these, or interfering with their ordinary action, is often misconstrued by truly spiritually-minded Christians as some evil influence affecting the mind, or some departure of divine influence from the heart; and they are unwarrantably cast down, depressed, and overwhelmed. In our present state we cannot conceive the mind separate from the body, or the body separate from the mind; their influence the one upon the other is so intense that often when the body is diseased we blame the mind, and when the mind is wrong, we sometimes blame the body: and hence I am always disposed to conclude that those dreadful cases that occur of individuals rushing unsent into the presence of God is not to be attributed to the mind, but purely to disease of the body; and being attributable to that, they are to be pitied rather than to be blamed. If that be so, it teaches us how dependant the mind is even upon health. It is a very humbling thing, that a very little incident happening to the body disturbs the mind, or the inhabitant within, and it becomes, therefore, a duty on the part of Christians who would enjoy and be thankful for the peace of God in their hearts, to attend, however humbling it may be, to the outward tabernacle in which the mind must reside for a season. Much of our happiness may depend upon this,—much of our *true peace* may depend upon it,—much of our

disquiet may arise from it. Therefore I would a many a Christian who is depressed and cast down, w begins to talk and feel as if God had cast him off, least to inquire whether it be not the *body*, and not t *mind*, that is wrong, and therefore not sin on yo part to be forgiven, but misfortune so far to be piti A day comes when the mind shall be disentangled fr the body, and be perfect; and a day also comes, not mu later, when the body shall be raised from its ruins, constituted, reconsecrated, and made the glorious shr of a glorious being; and so shall we be, in holine in happiness, and perfection, ever with the Lord.

DAVID'S SLAUGHTER OF GOLIATH.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DUEL. DAVID'S ARRIVAL. DAVID'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE CHALLENGE OF GOLIATH. ELIAB'S JEALOUSY. SAUL'S OBJECTION. DAVID'S TRUST AND VICTORY.

WE have here again presented to us the old picture of conflict and war between the Philistines and the Israelites. It appears that the two hostile armies were encamped upon two mountains, facing each other, with a deep valley between; and it is stated, as we read often in Latin story, and indeed in the history of all nations, that one champion of the Philistines was anxious to decide the issue by his own personal prowess. Now, this is the first outline of a fact analogous to what is called a duel. While war is perfectly justifiable on right grounds, and for right objects, a duel in no circumstances, and under no conditions, is so. A duel is staking the whole issue on the contingency of one or other of the two parties falling; but such is not the idea of war. The meaning of war, and the only ground on which it can be justified, is this, that a certain nation has done what is wrong, and tried to injure and to destroy us; and we are bound to go forth and defend what is our own, and repel the unjustifiable aggression: that is duty. But we must not draw lots about it; *we must not arrange a duel, and stake which*

is right or wrong upon the issue: we are to do what is right, and to defend our own; and if aggressors suffer in their lawless aggression upon us we are not guilty; we have only done our duty in trying to repel aggression. Duels were frequently practised in ancient times; and we have one recorded here, not as if God commanded it, but as a fact in history out of which instructive lessons may be drawn.

All Israel was alarmed. They had ceased to fear God; and now they began to fear phantoms among men. But David, whose name means "beloved," who came upon the stage in the previous chapter, leaves his sheep, not to go and meet this Philistine, but to carry cheese and parched corn to his brethren, who were in Saul's army, and were getting ready to go into battle. We read that "he left his carriage," or rather baggage, or luggage—not a vehicle to carry luggage, but the luggage itself—"in the hand of the keeper, and ran into the army, and came and saluted his brethren." And while he was talking to them, this great champion of the Philistines stepped forward and defied the armies of the living God. David then asked, "What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine?" He was told that the promise was, that first he should be made rich, and secondly, that Saul should give him his daughter in marriage. Here, again, a barbarous custom prevailed; the daughter would not be asked if she would have him, and the champion who should overcome would not be asked if he would have her; the thing was settled as bargains are struck in the market; it was a practice that prevailed then in barbarous times, and prevails still in Eastern nations.

David said he would go forth and fight with him. But Eliab, his eldest brother, jealous and envious, and frightened, that a younger brother should obtain the victory, when he, the elder brother, was shrinking like a coward, and afraid to meet the champion of the Philistines, rudely insulted him, and said, "I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle." David said, with great calmness, "What have I done? I have done no harm; I was sent on a proper errand; and is there any harm in my coming forward?" David still said he would go and fight this Philistine. Saul, amazed and startled at his proposal, replied, "Thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth." David appeals to his past experience; he says, "I was able to take a lion by the mane, and destroy him; I was able to destroy a bear when he entered the fold; and the same God that delivered me from them will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine who has defied the armies of Israel." Saul at last acquiesced, seeing a super-human inspiration apparently 'in David's heart, and believing that God was really and truly with him. He then armed David with his own armour; but David felt that this would not do; but still it showed that he felt it his duty, whilst he believed that he should conquer, to avail himself of every means of offence and defence in his power. He determined to take his staff, his shepherd's staff, which was not very heavy or cumbersome, and to select five smooth stones for his sling: why smooth stones? Because, as every one acquainted with the sling knows, the smoothness of the stone *gives it greater force and momentum* or rather

prevents friction when it is projected from the sling. Accoutred thus, he went forth to meet the Philistine, whose height, supposing the cubit to be eighteen inches, must have been nine feet; supposing the cubit to be twenty-one inches, as some calculate, it must have been upwards of eleven feet. When this huge giant came to meet this stripling, he laughed at him, and said he would give his flesh to the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field; full of confidence in his own vast physical power, and with no belief in the presence and the promise of the God of Israel. David's answer was truly beautiful; he said, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee not trusting in might nor in power, but in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied; whose honour is therefore involved, and by whose blessing I shall conquer thee. And all this assembly shall know." Now, here we have the motives, and the end, and the aim of David—"that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear"—that is, with human might, by human tactics—"for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands." You see, therefore, that he went forth, not from personal pride, not to gratify an ambitious passion; he felt an inspiration in his heart kindled from God prompting him to go; and, therefore, he went and defied the Philistine, not in his own strength, but in the name of the living God. We then read that David took the first stone out of his bag, slung it, and it smote the Philistine on the forehead, it being probably exposed, in consequence of his imagining the *absurdity* of anticipating any damage or wounds from

the stripling who came forth to meet him ; “ and the stone sunk into his forehead, and he fell upon his face to the earth.” So true is it, “ The Lord saveth not with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord’s ; ” the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite so found it. Then David took the Philistine’s sword, and cut off his head—which was often done in ancient times, to show completely the defeat of one and the victory of the other. And the men of Judah then took courage ; they were all cowards before, all frightened at the very shadow of Goliath ; but when this stripling conquered, they shouted, and pursued the Philistines, and scattered and destroyed them. David brought the head home. “ And when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said unto Abner, the captain of the host, Abner, whose son is this youth ? ” He himself knew, but he asked the question probably to excite remark, or observation, or explanation. “ And as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him, and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand.” And Saul said to him, “ Whose son art thou, young man ? ” I fear that Saul’s heart was beginning to be envious ; I fear that he was jealous of a rival now coming under the shadow of his throne : he knew very well who David was ; and the next chapter we shall read will evolve and set forth the feelings of Saul, the wicked feelings that rose in his heart, and how truly he could have wished that David had never conquered, and that the Philistine had never fallen by his hands.

We learn from these incidents that the race is not always to the swift, nor the victory to the strong. Were there *no God*, or were he withdrawn from the

Providential administration of the world, victory in every case would be in proportion to outward resources. But God reigns ; he disposes and arranges after principles which the Christian alone recognises, and the men of this world ignore or despise. It would be well if modern nations felt this more deeply, and if national policy were more thoroughly saturated by it. God has distinctly declared, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." A just cause, prosecuted in this spirit, and sustained by these principles, is sure of success. It is the law of heaven ; it is the true policy of mankind.

J E A L O U S S A U L .

CHAPTER XVIII.

SAUL'S JEALOUSY. DAVID AND JONATHAN. FEMALE CONGRATULATIONS. MUSIC AND MADNESS. DAVID'S BEAUTIFUL WALK.

IN the previous chapter David came, as the world would say, accidentally, into the camp of the Israelites; and whilst he was there a Philistine of huge stature came forth, and offered to decide the whole conflict by a duel. David accepted the challenge. He was laughed at by some, he was ridiculed by others; but at last the impression grew in the minds of those who had the command of the army that there was more than human presence with David, and that if the God of Israel was with him he could gain the battle, whether by one or by many. He went forth to meet the Philistine—killed him, cut off his head, and brought it as a trophy to the camp of Israel, and showed that he had obtained the victory, not by might nor by power, but by divine aid, that makes weakness strong, and one to chase a thousand. After this, we read that when David returned, Saul was partly delighted, partly envious; the whole of the chapter which we have now read, is a picture of the vacillation and lights and shadows upon *the spirit of a powerful monarch, who was envious*

of the prosperity, the growing greatness of a young stripling, taken from feeding the sheep of his father to occupy a place now in the councils and in the government of the nation, unprecedented in its past history.

The whole of the chapter before us is suggestive first of the greatness of moral power; the absence of it degraded this monarch, and placed him on a level with the lowest: the growth of holy and pure principle, sustained and characterised by a conduct the most unimpeachable, raised in the providence of God this young shepherd-boy to the highest rank in the land of Israel, and ultimately to the throne and sceptre of the realm.

The chapter opens with a declaration of the attachment of Jonathan, who, if David succeeded to the throne, would be superseded; yet, with a disinterestedness as beautiful as it was real, he "loved David even as his own soul." They entered into covenant with one another, to defend one another in all circumstances of trial, or of peril, or of difficulty.

We then read that when David returned from the battle in which he had gained the victory, and in which Saul also had some share, the women of Israel came out of all the cities, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, in order to show him homage. But the women answered, what the facts of the case irresistibly inspired, "Saul has indeed slain his thousands, and we praise him for it; but David, this young shepherd, has slain his tens of thousands." If this was the fact, Saul should not have felt it; if it was not the fact, he had the power to correct it; but the glory that *evidently* shone upon the steps of David, and sur-

rounded his whole character, made Saul "eye David from that day forward." Now, had he been a patriotic king, who loved his country and its interests, he would have been the first to reward, not only openly and ostensibly, but to recognise with all his heart one who had been raised up in a threatening exigency, and had been the instrument of destroying those whom it was their commission to destroy, and of defending that country of which he was the king, and whose interests ought to have been dear to him. But it came to pass that the same evil spirit that came upon Saul on a previous occasion, took possession of his heart again; and David, forgetting all the past ill-treatment he had received, played with his hand upon his harp, as at other times. But Saul, instead of rewarding this act of loyalty, of service, and of love, aimed a javelin at the heart of David; and David, without one word of remonstrance, without the least expression of disrespect or disloyalty to his sovereign, avoided the weapon; and the result was that "Saul was afraid of David." Why? "Because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul." We read, therefore, of Saul's policy to get rid of this troublesome aspirant, as he thought, to the throne; "he made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways." We should not only have wisdom, not only be able for a great enterprise or a great action, which one may easily prepare for; but we are in all life's sequestered paths, in all life's by-roads, in its little and its trivial things, as well as in its great and important things, to let the influence and the sunshine, and the sanctifying power of Christian character

predominate and be clearly seen. It is easier to die as a martyr than it is to live as a Christian : the highest and noblest martyrdom is a meek, patient, gentle, consistent, yet uncompromising and faithful life. For a great crisis there is often the preparation of great physical energy ; for martyrdom itself there is a corresponding spirit imparted which sustains and makes us ready for it ; but to bear all the little annoyances, and to pass patiently and meekly, leaving an impression in favour of the truth, through all the petty troubles of human life, nothing can do that but a heart right to the core ; and when a heart is right in the sight of God, all the rest will accord in just and beautiful proportion. Such was David's character ; his heart was right, and therefore everything else came in right also.

Saul offered to give David his eldest daughter to wife, never consulting, with the true spirit of a despot, whether David would have her, or whether she would have David ; but holding that his despotic will should alone be paramount and conclusive in all such arrangements ; and he asked only of David in return that he would be valiant for him, and fight the Lord's battles, not that he cared for the Lord, or for victory in his battles, but, it is said, "that the hand of the Philistines might be upon David ;" that is, that he might be killed, and that Saul might thus be rid of him. Then David said, "Who am I, and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king ?" You must notice throughout the whole of this chapter the exquisite delicacy that is fragrant as perfume in all the expressions of David, and the *loyalty* he exhibits. Though he knew Saul to be a

depraved man—though he knew his whole conduct to be inspired by envy, jealousy, hatred, malice, ill-will, and all uncharitableness, yet he never ceases to pay him all the deference that a subject owes to his sovereign, or for one moment to disregard by a single word what seemed outwardly a great and condescending honour on the part of Saul. Now that shows us that nothing that a king can do, where kingly power is despotic, should ever make us insult the office, or speak disrespectfully of it. It is possible to be firm to our principles, steadfast to our duties, to deplore conduct that is wrong, and on the proper occasion to express our regret that it is so, and yet to do it always with true deference to what is duty—always without speaking wrongfully, sinfully, or improperly of the powers that be—never forgetting that the ordinance is of God—and that no misuse or abuse of the ordinance by him that occupies it should ever make us act in a way unbecoming as subjects towards their sovereign, or as servants towards those that are over them in the Lord. David's character here shines most resplendently, though a shepherd-boy, beside the dark and scowling conduct of a sovereign, who had better opportunities, and ought to have known that if he had great dignity, he owed corresponding duty, and ought never to have so far disrobed himself of solemn responsibility to his country, to his people, and to his God.

Saul, again, when his eldest daughter was given to another, offered and gave to David his youngest daughter; and David again spoke with the same deference and loyalty, not saying a word that could be misconstrued as disrespectful. Saul sent him out to battle, *not that he cared to gain the victory, but that*

he hoped that David would be slain, and, strange evidence of the depravity into which the human heart can sink, Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and yet he was the more afraid of David, and became his enemy continually. The proper inference would have been that he loved him—that he blessed God for such a faithful servant, so brave a soldier, so devoted a subject; but instead of that, the more of heaven David set forth in his character, the more of hell seemed to be compressed into the heart of Saul. The contrast shows us how nobly grace can enable us to act, and to what terrible and desperate extremes a heart may be driven that dares to act in spite of the word and the law of God.

DAVID'S MIRACULOUS ESCAPES.

CHAPTER XIX.

JONATHAN'S FRIENDSHIP. DAVID PERSECUTED. DEVICE OF SAUL'S DAUGHTER. SAUL'S MESSENGERS PROPHECYING. SAUL AMONG THE PROPHETS.

WE have in this chapter the record of still further persecution of David by Saul, the son of Jesse, being in his judgment a rival for supremacy over Israel, a sort of half-avowed competitor for his throne. We see in Saul the instance of a man whose passions were restless as the waves of the sea, and those passions liable to be excited by the most unlikely causes and elements. There was everything in David's conduct that was loyal, dutiful, obedient, and good; there was nothing that could possibly be construed as crime: but this bad man looked at every object through the atmosphere of his own bad passions; and what would have appeared all sunshine to an ingenuous mind, appeared all evil, wickedness, and rebellion to his. But, by a very singular provision, we find that Saul's son, Jonathan, and Saul's daughter, Michal, whom he gave David to wife, were the means of preserving David from the cruelty and the machinations of their father; thus furnishing another startling evidence that where God has great purposes to accomplish by an individual, he will make his very *enemies* protect him; and in the home and

house of those that hate him he will provide shelter, protection, and peace. Jonathan, Saul's son, who delighted much in David, and was his intimate and bosom friend, warned David that his father Saul was seeking to kill him; he therefore asks him to go and hide himself until he should communicate with his father, and then tell him what the result was. Jonathan therefore went to Saul, and spoke to him about David. He said to him, in the language of common sense, "Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to theeward very good." And then he rehearses all the good he had done—"He put his life in his hand and slew the Philistine, and the Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel. This is not a fable, thou thyself wast a witness of it, wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?" Saul, moved by the impressive and eloquent address of his son, hearkened unto him and swore, "As the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain." Jonathan went, without the least breach of confidence, and told David what the result was, and David seems to have had some sense of security and peace for a little. But war broke out again. David went and fought with the Philistines, and slew them with a great slaughter. Now, one would have thought that he would have been raised to illustrious rank, that he would have been presented with some of the trophies and spoils of victory, or that Saul would in some public manner have expressed his admiration of one who never forsook him in times of peace, and was found at his post and in the *high places* of the field in the hour and day of battle.

But instead of that, this depraved and wicked monarch, under the influence of an evil spirit, made an attempt to destroy David; again, while David played upon his harp, as in former times, to lay the restless spirit of his royal master, the only reward he received was a javelin aimed at his head, which he very narrowly, and by great watchfulness escaped. When Saul was disappointed in killing him on this occasion, he sent messengers to his house to watch him. A bad ruler will never be without bad men to carry out his bad behests, and therefore he got persons hired to go and lie in wait for David, and if possible to destroy him. Saul's own daughter—dutiful to her husband, and dutiful in one sense, though indirectly, to her father, whom she would save from a great crime—made David escape, and, with the ingenuity which woman only is capable of, took a pillow of goats' hair for a bolster, covered it with a cloth, and took an image, and laid it in the bed, so as to appear like a man; and when Saul's messengers went to take David, she said,—what was untrue, and for which there can be no justification, for it is possible to show affection, and to have recourse to the most ingenious efforts to defend what is dear, and yet not to violate what never should be violated, truth,—“He is sick.” He was not so; he had escaped. But, you say, does not this justify the telling of a falsehood, when we see such a precedent for it in God's holy word? I answer, the Bible is a perfect picture of human nature; it states many things as precedents, but also many things as beacons to be avoided. You are not to imitate the bad, and refuse the good, but *you are to examine first the person, and next the*

principle in the light of God's holy law; and what is untrue is not to be imitated, if monarchs should be precedents upon their thrones; what is true is to be admired and imitated, if it should be repudiated by the greatest and the wisest among mankind. Because, therefore, Michal told a falsehood out of affection to her husband, we must never suppose for one moment that the excellency of the end, or even the purity of the motive,—for it was a very beautiful and holy motive,—can justify departuré from the express law and commandment of God. The messengers soon discovered the trick that had been played upon them, “and Saul said unto Michal, Why hast thou deceived me?” Had any one else done so, this fierce monarch would have slain her; but it was his own daughter, whom he gave David to wife, and therefore his affection to her preserved her from the death that she would have been exposed to had she been merely David's wife, but a stranger to Saul. “Michal answered Saul, He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee?”

“So David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah,” and told him “all that Saul had done to him.” He was driven from the court of Saul; he fled for refuge to the church of Samuel; and when he came there, he told Samuel the prophet all that had been done for him, all the perils he had escaped, and all the evidence of the good hand of God upon him in the midst of those perils. Saul, still exasperated, sent messengers to take David; but these messengers, it is said, when they came to Samuel and the prophets, began prophesying themselves. The word “prophecy,” in Scripture, does not mean always, nor even in a *variety of instances*, predicting future events—it means

setting forth, proclaiming, preaching, announcing truth; and you will find in the New Testament, in the Epistle to the Corinthians, how constantly the apostle alludes to prophesying, not as predicting what is future, but proclaiming truth applicable to the present; and if you read the prophets in the Old Testament, you will find that they as often rebuke present sins, inculcate present duties, as they predict future events in the history of the world. When they came, they joined the company; in other words, it is an illustration of the maxim you may have heard, that people come to church to scoff, and remain to pray,—these men came to deride the church of Samuel, and they remained in it, joining with him in praising God and proclaiming truth. Saul himself, naturally enraged that the very parties he sent to be his own representatives should ally themselves to the very party that he hated, resolved to go in person, and see if he could not do what they had failed to accomplish. He went there; the Spirit of God came upon him, and he himself prophesied; and it is said, “he stripped off his clothes, and lay down naked all that day and all that night.” The word “naked” was applied frequently of old, not only in sacred writings, but in profane writings also, to persons taking off the outer coat, or the outer garment: he took it off, and threw it on the ground, and lay, it is said, all night. So astonished were the people that Saul, the persecutor of David, should now become the preacher of David’s creed, that they asked in amazement, struck by the wonderful transformation, “Is Saul also among the prophets?” Now, it is here worthy of remark, at the *same time, that it does not follow that because Saul*

became a prophet he became therefore a Christian; for unhappily we read that "Some shall appear at that day, and shall say, Have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and done many wonderful works? And I will declare unto them, Depart from me, ye that work iniquity; I know you not." In other words, you may have the gifts of a prophet, but none of the graces of a Christian. If one should desire the best gifts, let God give his gifts to prophets as he pleases, but let us pray that ours may be that grace which teacheth to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world, and then it will not be Saul a prophet among the prophets, but Saul a Christian amid the people of God.

TRUE FRIENDSHIP.

CHAPTER XX.

DAVID GOES TO HIS FRIEND. DAVID'S DEVICE.

WE find first of all in this chapter that the bitter and revengeful feelings and passions of Saul had not undergone the least dilution or diminution; but that, actuated by hatred and jealousy towards David,—not because of anything intrinsically wrong in his conduct, but because he was more successful and got more praise for his exploits than Saul did,—he determined to bring him to a premature end. We have in this chapter a striking evidence of that true friendship which subsists among Christian men, consecrated and sustained by Christian principle. It has been argued by some that in the Bible there is no such thing as the sentiment of patriotism, no such sympathies as the reciprocities of human friendship. But this seems to be an utter mistake or misapprehension: here you have an instance of friendship the most intense, the most devoted; a friendship, we may observe, disinterested, for the death of David would have been Jonathan's succession to the throne; a friendship that never wavered, or faltered, which presents us with a model that cannot be exceeded in beauty, that cannot *have anything added to it to make it, if possible, more*

perfect. In the next place we have in this chapter the ingenious scheme that David and Jonathan hit upon, or devised from their own minds, by which David might escape the vengeance of the irritated Saul. First of all we read that David himself felt his life was in jeopardy, and went to Jonathan, his bosom friend—and to have a friend into whose ear one can pour one's trials is to take away half the bitterness and lighten half the load;—and he told him, "What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life? And Jonathan said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die." He had a better opinion of his father than he deserved; but he said, "If my father seeketh to kill thee, he would not hide it from me. But David sware"—that is, specially protested—and said, "Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and instead of this being a protection to me, it will kindle into fiercer flame the jealousy of that unhappy heart; and your father will be more vexed and irritated, because I have found favour in thine eyes." Then Jonathan said to him, as a true friend, "Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee." David said to Jonathan, "To-morrow is the new moon; I shall be with the king at his festival; I am married to the king's daughter, and of course I must take my place in the king's palace; but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field until the third day at even. If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Bethlehem, his city: for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all his family." Now, at first, on *reading this* I had the idea that David suggested this

as a mere pretext, which cannot be vindicated, for deception is incapable of vindication ; but had it been so, it would not imply that God applauds it.

The Bible is the perfect exhibition of human nature as it is by the fall, and the perfect exhibition of human nature as it is by grace ; and just as sure as you find in man regenerated all the traits of exalted character, so sure will you find in man as he is all the traits that Adam has bequeathed, and Satan has increased and intensified ever since. Therefore when you find in this book a sin perpetrated by a character recorded in it, that sin is not set forth as a precedent we are to follow, but as a beacon over the wreck, if wreck there was, to teach us to avoid and shun it. If you expect in any Christian in the Bible a perfect character, you confound the church in grace with the church in glory. There is no such thing on earth at the present moment as a perfect Christian ; and the more we know each other, the more we shall feel how much there is to pray for, how much there is to forgive. The man who throws the first stone is not the most innocent and guiltless in the sight of a holy God.

There is another reason why these characters are set before us ; contrast them all with one—take the character of our blessed Lord ; take the portrait of that character as sketched by the evangelists ; it has been hung up in the skies for 1800 years ; they that loved him have examined it, they that hated him have analysed it ; but all the eyes of friends and foes for 1800 years gazing upon that perfect apocalypse of God in our nature, have not succeeded in discovering *one flaw, defect, or imperfection*. What a contrast is

there, then, between David's Lord and David himself! All vessels here are flawed but one; all characters here are defective but one; all the gold here has alloy except that fine gold tried in the fire, pure, perfect, without precedent and without parallel. But, it seems that this statement of David was not really a pretext; but that David went to Bethlehem, offered the sacrifice, and then came back and hid himself in the field, and waited there for the issue of what Jonathan had suggested. David says, "If he say thus, it is well; thy servant shall have peace; but if he be very wroth, then be sure that evil is determined by him. Therefore thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant." Jonathan again protests that if he knew that evil was to betide him, he would be sure to tell him. He therefore calls him out into a field, for the sake of being sequestered from inspection, or from itching ears, anxious to hear and to report; and they arranged a very ingenious scheme, perfectly innocent,—that Jonathan should shoot three arrows on the third day; if the arrows went beyond, and he told the lad to bring them from beyond, then David was to clearly understand that meant he was to be off, that his life was in danger; but if he said that the arrow was not beyond, but upon this side, then he might be sure of his safety, and come out and stand before the king.

Jonathan appeared in his accustomed place. Saul did not care for David's absence the first day; in fact, he rather thought he might be absent because he was killed, which would have been a most happy riddance in his judgment. But on the second day he thought *he might* as well ask; and then he was told that he

had merely gone to offer sacrifice ; that he was quite well and alive. Saul was exasperated, not because David had disregarded his hospitality, but because he had lost the opportunity of throwing a javelin at his head, or his heart, and killing him. We then read that when this took place Jonathan carried the pre-arranged plan into practice, and gave David warning that he must depart. The parting between these two friends was exceedingly touching and very beautiful.

Now, how was it that David was thus protected ? A divine hand was constantly upon him, a great destiny was before him : Jonathan saw it from the prophetic record, and acted so confidential, so successful, so admirable a part, partly because he loved his friend, and partly because he saw in the shepherd son of Jesse the occupant of an illustrious throne—a fore-father, according to the flesh, of Him who was at once the root and the offspring of Jesse.

DAVID'S FALSEHOOD.

CHAPTER XXI.

DAVID'S SIN. HIS PUNISHMENT.

DAVID in this instance grievously sinned. He told what was a deliberate untruth, and an untruth that precipitated the slaughter of the priests. Cowardice was at the bottom of his criminal conduct. He presents a melancholy proof that his character was far from perfect; and the sequel of his life will yet further show the grievous consequences of his sin. David's painful and miserable condition as described at the end of the chapter seems to indicate that God had visited him with severe paralysis as just chastisement for his sin. The Scripture does not conceal this sin, and we dare not justify it; it was ill done, and proved of sad consequence; for it occasioned the death of the priests of the Lord. He thought upon it afterwards with regret. David had great faith and courage, yet both failed him: he fell thus foully through fear and cowardice, and owing to the weakness of his faith. Had he trusted God aright, he would not have used such a sorry, sinful shift for his own preservation. He had reason to put confidence in Achish, yet he began to be afraid. His conduct

was degrading, and discovered wavering in his faith and courage in the time of trial. This was a grave and inexcusable fault. It is nevertheless plainly told. The more simply we depend on God, and obey him, the more comfortably and surely we shall walk through this troublesome world.

Sin is chastised or punished sooner or later: God never suffers it to exist with impunity. Judgment begins first at the house of God. It was at this period that David composed Psalm lvi., which breathes a devout spirit and a firm faith.

However exemplary, in some respects, David's conduct was, we must neither overlook nor imitate his sins. A lie is a great sin, whether on royal, sacerdotal, or lay lips. The sword David had dedicated to God becomes here his support. We never lose by giving to God.

Doeg was a hypocrite "detained before the Lord." His service was constraint, and shows David's service was ever real, and from the heart.

We find in the very best characters delineated in the word of God many and grievous defects. There is nothing of the novel or romance in this blessed book. All is sketched from life. The only perfect character is the Son of Man. Had the writers of the word of God been actuated by self-glorification, or national vanity, or any similar carnal passion, they would not have revealed the besetting sins and chief flaws of the founders of their nation, and the glory of their economy. The faithfulness with which they recorded facts as they transpired, irrespectively of all party, or pride, or national feeling, proves they were guided by *an inspiration far higher than human, and wrote in*

every instance as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. These indirect proofs of inspiration are conclusive. God selected instruments for carrying out his great designs, not because they were perfect but in spite of their imperfections. It is expected that man should always be seen as he is, and that God should have all the glory of all that is good and great in the history of the world.

CHARACTER OF SAUL.

CHAPTER XXII.

DAVID'S RETREAT. HIS ARMY. DAVID'S APPLICATION TO THE KING OF MOAB. THE ROYAL ANSWER. DOEG THE EDMITE. GOD'S ADVICE. SAUL'S APPEAL. AHIMELECH'S ACCOUNT OF HIMSELF. DUTY TO GOD. DOEG'S MURDER OF THE PRIESTS. MAN'S HEART.

In this chapter is the continuation of the portrait of Saul, with which we have become familiar in the course of our study of the chapters that immediately precede. He was a man of fitful temper, of violent passions, the victim of jealousy, burning with envy; seeing much in David that he loved, more that he admired, but more still that he dreaded, as if David were a candidate for his throne, too sure of success, and clearly anxious to displace him and his dynasty by the appointment and consecration of his own. This accounts for many of the scenes that subsequently ensue, and which reflect so great discredit upon Saul the king, and in most instances confer great honour upon David, the king's son-in-law. David, long hunted like a partridge on the mountains, a fugitive and friendless, at last finds a retreat in a fortified place—fortified partly by nature, from whence it was called a cave, and partly by art; so that he could in some degree defend himself against *the violent and uncalled-for attacks of the persecuting*

and malignant Saul. It appears that David had a strange and motley group of bandits and beggars for his army, and very equivocal support in his counsellors about him. These he brought into discipline, and made them agree and coalesce in a common object. His success was striking. Those whom he had to conciliate were the very off-scourings of the land—men that fled to him not because they were patriotic, nor that they cared for his credit, or very much for his safety; but because many of them were deeply in debt, and wanted to satisfy creditors—honestly if they could, dishonestly if they could not; and others were discontented, quarrelsome, and fretful people, dissatisfied with everything in which they did not play a part, and that a conspicuous part: and they gathered themselves unto him, and he became—much to his own personal inconvenience, I have not the least doubt, but still from sheer necessity—captain and leader over them. Of these discontented debtors and malcontents there were altogether about four hundred, and with this motley band David had to pursue his mission and to defend himself. These were not patriots, that gathered round him to defend their fatherland; they were not honest men, enlisting to lend their aid for pay to the cause they believed to be right: they fled to him simply because they were repelled from everybody else, and were actuated by the most mercenary, selfish, and contemptible motives and aims. David, however, as if conscious that he had very little security in the bosom of such a motley and miserable group, went to Mizpeh of Moab, and told the King of Moab, “I have very little in this world *that I care much about, except my father and m*

mother. I am quite sure that these vagabonds I have gathered together will not help me in protecting them; will you, therefore, do me the kindness to take both of my aged parents, Jesse and my mother, until I know what God in his providence will do for me?" And the King of Moab undertook the charge of them.

The prophet Gad advised David not to abide any longer in Adullam, but to escape. Saul having heard that David was discovered in his retreat, and the men that were with him, instantly addressed his servants: "Hear now, ye Benjamites;" and appealing purely to what is mercenary in their hearts, he said, "Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds, that all of you have conspired against me?" He supposed, having a mercenary soul himself, that nobody could be actuated by anything but mercenary motives. It is rare that any but mercenary persons impute to others mean and mercenary ends. Saul substantially said to them, "Do you think you will get better vineyards, better wines, better food, better raiment, from this restless fellow David than from me? I ask you to look to your own interests, make them the chief thing, and consider well the main chance, and then decide accordingly." Doeg the Edomite, set over the servants of Saul, was a vile person, whose whole heart was bent upon his own personal aggrandisement, and he was ready to lie, or to receive, or to malign, or to curse, or to praise, just as was most expedient, if it would only promote his own base and selfish ends. Doeg became a tale-bearer, and very needlessly said, "I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub,"

—that is the high priest;—“and he inquired of the Lord for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.” In all this Doeg acted as a spy. If Saul had been a right principled man he would have ordered Doeg to be put to death; but, instead of that, it served his purpose to make use of him; and Doeg felt it served his to act as a spy; and therefore Saul accepted the information which Doeg volunteered, and sent for the venerable high priest, and asked him, “Are these things so?” Ahimelech the high priest replied in language so perfectly transparent, so ingenuous, so palpably true, that his innocence would have been established and vindicated in the estimate of any sensible, charitable, or good man. He said, “I never could have meant to enter into any conspiracy against your majesty’s throne; for David is your son-in-law, he married your daughter; and when he came to me, a fugitive and in want, and alleging that he had a message from the king, I gave him food, that is perfectly true; and as he had no sword to defend himself,”—society then, like some outposts of society now, being beset with plunderers and thieves,—“I gave him one to defend himself; and in all this I acted, I believed and felt, as a loyal subject, and a dutiful servant of the crown; and never dreamed of doing anything that could give offence to you, or be misconstrued by the most uncharitable person in the land.” Saul, however, instead of accepting this explanation, ordered his servants, called here footmen, that is, infantry, to put the priests to death. These noble-minded men saw that this was a command utterly unlawful in the sight of God, transparently and unmistakeably so; and they refused to exe-

cute it, thus obeying God, and, having refused to obey man, they were ready to take the consequences. Doeg was a handy and pliant personage, always ready for any wickedness, who would flinch from no crime, if it would only subserve his own wretched, selfish objects. Doeg the Edomite, therefore, steps in and says, "I am at your service; and with my friends and assistants I am ready to clear away all these rubbish of priests, who have turned traitors and conspired against your majesty." The priests were all slain with the edge of the sword; and not satisfied with that, he put to death infants, and women, and children, and oxen, and asses, with the edge of the sword, and destroyed the whole city of Nob.

Abiathar showed all this to David. David, with a deeply sensitive heart, though conscious of perfect innocence in the matter, felt that he had been the occasion, if not the cause, of all the slaughter; and wept, and sorrowed, and grieved in the sight of God.

What a strange thing must a naked human heart be, seen in its moral character, and by an eye that can inspect and disentangle all its complicated motives, ends, objects, passions, and desires! How truly do we learn, from history as well as from inspiration, that from Saul that occupied the throne down to Doeg the Edomite, the mercenary and subservient minister of his vile passions, the heart of man is by nature deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Human historians, in their pages, depict outward facts, and visible events, tracing as they may be able with the intuition of genius the links that knit them together; but the historians of God's word, inspired by his spirit, and *seeing things in a higher and purer light, not only*

depict outward phenomena, events and facts, and links that unite them, but also lay bare the motives and springs in which they originate, and show what a poor man is capable of, if it were not for the grace of Almighty God.

David here displayed the affection of a son. He is content to suffer if the parents' are safe.

What a melancholy wretch is Saul! His passions are the scorpions that torment him.

VICISSITUDES.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DAVID AT KEILAH. REVELATION. DAVID'S VICTORY OVER THE PHILISTINES. ABIATHAR, SON OF THE MURDERED HIGH PRIEST, COMES TO DAVID. DAVID DISCOURAGED. REALITY OF INSPIRED HISTORY. GOD'S WAYS OF RULING ON EARTH AND DEALING WITH MAN. JONATHAN BEFRIENDS DAVID. SAUL'S HUMILIATING CONFESSION.

DAVID is still a fugitive from the persecuting fury and envy of Saul. In the course of his flight he came into the neighbourhood of Keilah, a city in which dwelt the son of the high priest who had been slain by Doeg the Edomite; and he heard that the Philistines, who were to be extirpated by Israel, and to extirpate whom was their special duty, had besieged Keilah, and were resolved to destroy it, and had already plundered it of much of its food. David inquired of the Lord whether a fugitive, with a handful of men, should endeavour to deliver this friendly city from the Philistines. How David inquired of God we are not told; whether it was by means of the high priest, or whether it was simply by prayer, to which an answer was directly given, it is impossible for us to say: all that we do know is, that God then, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake unto the fathers; but that now *he has spoken to us by his Son, and the record of that*

speech is in his own written and inspired word. But before the Bible was written—that is to say, before God's mind concerning us was committed to writing, and thus invested with a permanent shape—he spoke sometimes from the burning bush, sometimes from the rock, sometimes by dreams, sometimes by an audible voice, but he never left the human family, since that family fell, without direct communications from himself as to what their way ought to be, and what was the nature of the destiny that lay before them. God encouraged David to defend Keilah from the Philistines: this brave son-in-law of Saul did so, discomfited the Philistines, smote them with a great slaughter, and saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, fled to David, and came with an ephod in his hand—perhaps having received the sacerdotal ornaments of the high priest who had been slain, and in all probability officiating in his place and stead.

David heard that his old enemy, Saul, was still tracking his footsteps, determined to destroy him, and therefore again he consulted the God of Israel, and asked, “Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into the hand of Saul? I have defended Keilah from the Philistines,—will Keilah, according to a gratitude that the world often shows to its highest benefactors, deliver me up as a victim to cruel Saul? The Lord said, He will come down. Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the Lord said, They will deliver thee up. Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they *could go.*” The first thought that strikes one on

reading this passage is, Why should God take a circuitous route, as it were, to protect and defend his servant David? why did he not at once strike down the persecuting Saul, and for ever give a charmed life to the persecuted David? The answer to this is, the whole history of the church in this book is not that of human life in strange circumstances, but human life in all its fugitive lights and shadows just as it is. It is merely God lifting the veil that lies upon man's history, and letting us see by the springs how that history is practically and actually carried on. It is not the picture of humanity in a new state, but the picture of our race just as it runs its course onward to the eternal world. We find now that vice prevails, and virtue languishes: why does not God exercise omnipotence, put an end to vice and glorify virtue? In other lands, superstition hangs like a dark canopy of cloud over the visible church: why does he not scatter it by a touch of his almighty hand, and sprinkle the nations with the first beams of the rising Sun of righteousness? The answer is, God does not do by force what is only to be done through truth; he carries on his world not as if it were made up of irrational, irresponsible beings, but of intelligent men, and therefore, through human instrumentality, aiding where it is requisite, strengthening where strength is weak, bringing out victory on victory, the earnest of the last glorious victory that will crown all, and in such a way that man shall be seen humbled in the dust, and God glorified and exalted above the skies. Man is nevertheless not treated as a machine, nor as a dumb brute, but always as capable of thought, reflection, decision, responsibility, free to fail and free to *persevere*; and, therefore, what we have here is

a picture of God showing us the inner mechanism of human history—that mechanism which is still in action, but which he has now veiled from our sight. The Bible is the picture of human nature as it is, as it acts, as it works, and along with that the picture of human nature as it will be when it shall be glorified and crowned with the glory of Him who has redeemed it by his precious blood; and, hence, we read of Saul's ceaseless persecution, and God standing by and permitting it; we read of David's ceaseless suffering, and God looking on and permitting it also; but when we come to the winding up of all, we shall see that here, as elsewhere, it was best as it was, and that anything different, or after our preference, would not have been equally for our good or for God's praise.

David abode yet longer in the wilderness, and Jonathan came to him, and encouraged and cheered him, and, for the third time, made a covenant or a compact with him. We read of the Ziphites coming to Saul, urging him to come down and seize David, for that they would deliver him into his hand. What a strange index is presented here to the character of Saul! When these Ziphites told him, "Now David is within your reach, you may lay your hand upon him and kill him," what did Saul say? "Blessed be ye of the Lord, for ye have compassion on me,"—implying that the thirst for revenge that burned in that royal heart was so intense, so intolerable, that when any one showed him how he could satiate that vengeance, he blessed God that they had compassion on him, as much as to say, "I am to be pitied—I am deeply to be commiserated;" and, certainly, no man is *to be so* pitied as he who nourishes in his heart envy,

hatred, revenge, malice, for these, like serpents and vipers, feed upon the life-blood of his happiness,—as if God would teach human nature in its ruins that sin is intrinsically misery, that whatsoever things are just, and beautiful, and good, and true, are essentially happiness and peace.

Saul came up with David, and David's six hundred men and Saul's large army were encamped opposite each other. David felt that he could not stand, he saw that he and his band would be crushed; but the incident that occurred illustrates what Providence illustrates still,—man's extremity to be God's opportunity; for when David and his men were about to be crushed by the overwhelming force of Saul, a messenger comes to Saul, and tells him that the Philistines had invaded his own land; he therefore leaves David, as his vengeance was about to be satisfied, and runs home to save his capital from an invading foe.

Here is another chapter in the providential dealings of God, another act in the melancholy history of that infatuated monarch, whose heart was burnt up with envy, revenge, hatred, and malice; and who shows us that neither purple robes, nor diadem, nor splendour, nor power, nor wealth, nor riches, can ever constitute happiness where there is a heart at war with God, and at war with our brethren of mankind.

David's meek spirit under harsh treatment is worthy of all imitation.

The source of direction in difficulties is God. What David sought by means of the breastplate of the high priest, we seek in the page of Scripture.

David found what we too shall find, that a true *religion alone is real support and consolation.*

MAGNANIMITY.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DAVID AT EN-GEDI. SAUL'S PURSUIT. SAUL FALLS ASLEEP IN THE CAVE—IS IN DAVID'S POWER. DAVID CUTS OFF THE SKIETS OF SAUL'S CLOAK. DAVID'S TENDER ADDRESS TO SAUL. SAUL'S APPRECIATION AND LOVE.

DAVID, still a fugitive from the persecuting fury of Saul, reached, at last, the wilderness of En-gedi, situated on the western edge of the Dead Sea, very mountainous, and abounding with caverns, as historians and travellers inform us, of very great depth, size, and extent. Saul, hearing that David had fled to En-gedi, and determined at whatever cost to extirpate him and his from the earth, that there might be found no successor to the throne in the shepherd son of Jesse, pursued him with three thousand men amid the rocks that were trodden only by the wild goats; the very expression, "rocks of the wild goats," implying their height, their slipperiness, and their precipitous character—the goat being able to climb safely where other creatures are unable to follow: at length he came to the sheepcotes, somewhere on level ground, where there was a cave. In eastern countries we read frequently of caves in the rocks, and in the hills, being employed by travellers for the purpose of sheltering them from *the scorching* heat of the sun at noonday, and where,

covering up their feet with their cloak or plaid, they lie down and repose in a cool and delicious atmosphere. Saul, wearied probably by the chase, went in, covered up his feet, and fell asleep. David—by a singular chance the world would call it, by an arrangement providential and predetermined, we know well—went into the same cave. The instant that the men of David saw Saul asleep, they said to David, “This is the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand.” David perhaps was at first tempted to kill one who had done him so much wrong, and for whom, and his crown and throne, he had suffered so much evil. He rose, however, and only cut off the skirt of the large outer robe of the sleeping monarch, while his sleep was not disturbed—a skirt which David kept as a sort of trophy. But having done this, he felt at first, in his sensitive conscience, as if he had acted wrong; he thought within himself, “Whatever be the conduct of the man, he is the king; and if I am dissatisfied with him, the individual, as I have just cause to be, that is not to make me rise up against the ordinance of God, and injure him who, with all his personal faults, is the King of Israel, and its legitimate and proper ruler.” It is said, therefore, his heart smote him, because he had used the freedom of cutting off even a portion of Saul’s robe. Perhaps he did it at first without any deliberate ultimate design; but we shall see in the sequel of the story that this seeming accident was the evidence to Saul how much he was in the power of David, and thereby a demonstration he could not resist that he had to *deal not with a venomous opponent, but with a loving,*

loyal, and Christian young man, who, in spite of his wrongs, wished well to Saul, and prosperity to his kingdom, and who would not, even when the monarch was in his power, gratify the passion of revenge by putting to death one who so well deserved to die. Accordingly, David went out of the cave afterwards, and cried after Saul in language that became a subject addressing his king, "My lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself. And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt,"—that is, bad counsellors and ministers around the throne, who were seeking selfish and nefarious objects and ends, tried to indoctrinate the heart of the king with this untrue notion, that David was his enemy, and seeking to destroy him. "Now," said David, "if I be your enemy, I had you in my power; why did I spare you? Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord had delivered thee to-day into mine hand in the cave, and some bade me kill thee, but mine eye spared thee, and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed." And then he appeals to the fragment of his robe which he had cut off, to show how surely Saul might have been his victim; and how true was his own assertion that he had no private party or revengeful feeling towards one from whom, however, he had received nothing but evil, but whose evil he wished to overcome with good, heaping coals of fire upon his head, remembering that vengeance belongs unto the Lord, and that he will repay. David added, "Now that I have shown you I have *no hostile feelings* towards you as my sovereign, what

can put it into your head so to pursue and persecute me? After whom is the King of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue?—after a dead dog?”—a proverbial expression denoting one of no consequence—“one who is really not worth the expenditure of so much trouble, or the excitement of your heart by so much fury.” And when David had thus shown what he really felt, and proved what he felt by very sensible and very irresistible evidence, Saul showed that with all his cruelty there lay in the quiet depths of his heart much of human sensibility, and that he could appreciate disinterested sacrifice and goodness. “Saul then lifted up his voice and wept;” and he said to David—what was really David’s noblest triumph, a far more splendid triumph than if he had killed the king and seated himself upon his throne—“Thou art more righteous than I, for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil,” a most just and suggestive expression. If you want to destroy your bitterest enemy, do him good. The way to exasperate his enmity is to retaliate blow for blow, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; that is human nature, and human nature in its ruin. But if you are actuated by the merest policy, if it were not your better nature, but a mere course of policy that would redound to the greatest good, the best policy would be to reward evil with good, to overcome hatred with loving-kindness, and to let men feel how mean is revenge, how magnificent is the retaliation of loving-kindness, and of good for evil. And, therefore, Saul argues, “If a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? *wherefore the Lord* reward thee good for that thou

hast done unto me this day : and now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king." Strange event—he who pursued David to destroy him is now prostrate a suppliant at his feet, and begs of him with prophetic impulse, when he shall be king, to deal tenderly with him and his! David, with all the candour by which he was characterised, sware to him accordingly.

Let us ask ourselves, is there here any precedent for us? Is this a lesson we have practised in the world before? When your enemy, if you have one, is in your power, do you seek at any risk to satiate that horrid passion, revenge, or do you let gush forth that divine passion, love, mercy, forbearance? Do you carry into practice that commandment, "Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you?" These facts in history are pregnant lessons to us. Precedents so beautiful, so expedient, so holy, cannot be too carefully stored in the memory, too ardently exhibited in the life; and were the whole of mankind to treat one another as David treated Saul, we should begin to breathe the air and bask in the sunshine of millennial day, and earth would begin to melt away into all the glory and the blessedness of heaven. God delivered Saul into David's hand. It was an opportunity given to David to exercise faith and patience. He had a promise of the kingdom, but no command to slay the king. He reasons strongly, both with himself and with his men, against doing Saul any hurt. He not only would not do this bad thing himself, but he would not suffer those about him to do it. Thus he rendered good for evil to him from whom he received evil for good, and was *herein* an example to all who are called Christians,

not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good.

Saul acknowledged his fault. God made good to David that word on which he had caused him to hope—"that he would bring forth his righteousness as he light" (Ps. xxxvii. 6). Those who take care to keep a good conscience may leave it to God to secure them the credit of it. Saul went home convinced, but not converted; ashamed of his envy to David, yet remaining in his breast that root of bitterness. Malice often seems dead when it is only asleep, and will revive with double force. Yet, whether the Lord bind men's hands, or affect their hearts, so that they do not hurt us, the deliverance is equally from him.

In all our difficulties let God be our trust.

No facilities for a sinful act should induce us to yield.

Saul was convinced, but not converted—a very true and awful distinction.

NABAL AND ABIGAIL.

CHAPTER XXV.

ANCIENT RICHES. NABAL: HIS MISFORTUNE AND HIS SIN—
LINEAGE AND TEMPER. NABAL'S GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL WIFE.
DAVID'S REQUEST. NABAL'S INSOLENCE. DAVID'S COURSE.
THE PRUDENT SERVANT. ABIGAIL'S CONDUCT AND DISCOURSE.
THE DRUNKEN HUSBAND. HIS DEATH. THE WIDOW ABIGAIL
BECOMES DAVID'S WIFE.

WE have in this chapter a gallery of portraits, extremely expressive, beautifully drawn, and, because inspired, true to the originals, for from originals they were unquestionably sketched. First of all we read of the death of Samuel, the prophet and the judge, and of his burial. We are next introduced to a man who is said to have been very great, and had "three thousand sheep and a thousand goats; and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel." Riches in those days were not expressed by what we call a circulating medium; there was no circulating medium equal to the expression and measure of a man's possessions: the consequence was, that wealth consisted of sheep, or oxen, or changes of garment, or lands; and transactions were carried on upon the broad earth and the green fields as the only exchange, by giving sheep for oxen, or oxen for sheep, or either for flour or bread, or *anything* besides which men wanted. And hence the

origin of the word *pecunia*, which we have incorporated almost in our tongue—*pecunia* in Latin meaning money, and having its derivation from *pecus*, cattle, being the earliest wealth; the earliest coins that we know, have on the obverse the picture of an ox or a sheep, thus indicating the origin and the real nature of what is called wealth or property. This man's name was Nabal, which means strictly, a silly or a foolish person: if he had been of this character only, it might have been his misfortune; a person is not responsible for having little intellect, or poor judgment, or a weak imagination, because such are given him of God, or is produced by nature, and for these, therefore, he is not responsible; but Nabal was responsible, and deeply to be blamed for his conduct, for this foolish, silly man was also—what was criminal on his part—churlish, that is, brutish, coarse, fretful, angry, and of a bad temper. His doings also were like his temper, churlish and evil. He was of the house of Caleb, one that followed the Lord fully; but he had the misfortune to inherit a noble name, and to disgrace that name by a churlish, obstinate, and perverse temper, character, and conduct. Far better have a good temper and a pious heart, and no ancestral lineage to refer to, than have the noblest ancestry in the world, but have the distinction to disgrace it by conduct inconsistent with and unworthy of it. Nabal insists much on the property he had in the provisions of his table. We mistake, if we think we are absolute lords of what we have, and may do what we please with it. No; we are but stewards, and must use it as we are directed, remembering it is not our own, but his who *trusted us with it*. David determined to destroy Nabal,

and all that belonged to him. But had David been so long in the school of affliction, where he should have learned patience, and is he yet so passionate? What are the best of men, when God leaves them to themselves? thus at least they may know what is in their hearts. God is kind to the evil and unthankful: let us be so. Nabal had married a woman whose first and noblest feature was that she had "a good understanding," and that is strikingly shown in her dialogue with David; and, secondly, that "she was a woman of a beautiful countenance;" and it was a great misfortune that so good and beautiful a woman should be married to so churlish and ill-tempered a husband. Such matches do take place. Who is to blame we cannot say; we can only pity her who is the victim, and condemn the conduct of him, the churlish and the evil, for his doings.

David, being now in the wilderness of En-gedi, a refugee from Saul, who still hunted him like a partridge on the mountains, along with the handful of men with whom he had fled, and being reduced to great straits, sent out ten young men to this Nabal, instructing them to address him in the most courteous, Christian, and becoming terms. "Greet him in my name,"—that is, present my compliments to him,— "and thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast." Nothing was more calculated to subdue the ill-temper of Nabal, and to make an opening for the very reasonable request that David was about to make. He bade the young men tell Nabal, "We have protected your shepherds when *they were exposed to peril, and though we may have*

lived like wandering Arabs, and like the emir of the desert, living upon plunder, yet that has not been our character; but, on the contrary, we have protected your shepherds, we have taken nothing from them, which we might have done by stealth or by force, if we had been so disposed. Ask your own young men, and they will be witnesses in our favour. And therefore I beg of you now that you will look to these young men; and as we are poor, and hungry, and destitute, we ask you not for luxuries, not for things that you could with difficulty spare, but the very first thing, be it sheep, or oxen, or bread, the very first thing that cometh to your hands, give it unto thy servants, and to thy son David;" it is the language of affection.

When they had made this reasonable request, couched in the most courteous terms (for courtesy is almost next to, certainly it is the genuine expression of true, Christianity), Nabal, you would have thought would have said, if he had not anything to spare, that he was extremely sorry it was not in his power, and returned the courtesy with which they had approached him. But this sulky, ill-tempered fool, instead of doing so, breaks forth into the most abusive language, "Who is this David?"—just as if he did not know perfectly well—"and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master, and I daresay he is some runaway servant, who has lost his place by his misconduct, his dishonesty, and bad temper; and as he would not work for his bread, no doubt he has come to me in order to live in indolence, in ease, and at other people's expense." Not that there was the least ground for such surmises; it was his own vile imagination and horrid temper that

suggested this most uncharitable construction. And then he exclaims, being a genuine monopolist, "Shall I take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" What a thorough specimen of a man who is a perfect vortex, absorbing everything, and in no respect a spring or fountain, giving out anything! "Everything is mine:" and yet it was not; he was but a trustee for God, responsible to God for his use or abuse of it; and instead of hugging it closer to himself, as if that would save it, he ought rather to have dispersed, to have given to the poor, and to have tasted a blessing that would have sweetened his sour temper. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and they that water others shall themselves be watered."

David, notwithstanding all he had done, finding his young men sent back without a single morsel of bread, showed that he had some temper too. Perhaps he was not called upon to do what he did; he ordered his men to gird on their swords, to make ready instantly to take by force what this man would not give by courtesy. Hospitality was then a duty; it is so, though not in the same way, now: to refuse hospitality was then a crime; and for David to go to this wealthy, ill-tempered monopolist, who had refused bread to those that were perishing of hunger, and to take it by force, in such and so unsettled a state of society, and also under such circumstances and such *régime* as was that of Israel, was perhaps only what was his due. He went accordingly with all his men.

But there happened to be in this churlish man's *service* a very good servant, who loved the man in

spite of his vile temper, and loved his mistress, notwithstanding all that had occurred. He therefore went to her in confidence, and told her the fact—that Nabal had acted in a very wrong way—that David was excessively angry—that he was coming to avenge himself, and that he would sweep the place clear of all its inhabitants—take everything that Nabal called his own, unless some attempt was made to propitiate him, and to satisfy his reasonable demands. Abigail forthwith went out with an immense quantity of provision, with clusters of raisins, cakes of figs, parched corn, sheep and wine, and loaves; and when she met David, she fell on her face, and said, in most beautiful and touching language, “Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be.” I quote these words for a different or spiritual purpose; it is this: we read frequently of our iniquities being laid upon Christ: “On him were laid,” says Isaiah, “the iniquities of us all.” Some people try to show that these words do not mean substitution of the innocent for the guilty. Take the expression as it occurs here, where no controverted point is involved, and ask what is the meaning of Abigail’s language, “Upon me let the iniquity be.” Does it not mean, “Let me suffer; let me be punished for what has been done?” And, therefore, when we speak of our iniquities being laid upon him, we mean that he endured what we deserved, and by his stripes we are healed. She says, “Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial.” That was rather a strong expression for a wife to use of her husband; but no doubt his conduct justified it, and in David’s judgment certainly it was not over the truth. And she said, *with great good sense*, “Nabal is his name, and

folly is with him. Now, therefore, my lord, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the Lord hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal." And then she says, "I pray thee forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house,"—knowing that David was to be king in Israel. And she adds, "Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul; but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life." Here is, indeed, a beautiful expression, a precious truth. "And it shall come to pass, when you shall have ascended to the throne that shall ever be known by the name of the throne of David, and shall wear the royal purple, and shall sway a sceptre without a precedent for its greatness, and without a parallel for its glory, that at that day, if you will only spare my poor foolish husband and them that are his, you will have no lurking regret in your memory that you have shed blood, nor that my lord hath avenged himself." The argument is most admirable: we should never do a deed, the recollection of which will be painful; it is a reason for abstinence not only from crime, but from what, lawful in itself, must be painful in our recollections. David at once accepted it: "Blessed," he said, "be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me." The eloquence of her speech, the impressiveness of her appearance, the candour with which she spoke, the just arguments which she used, show that a woman may be, as she has often showed herself, possessed of intellect superior to that of man; and that the notion that woman is intellectually an inferior

being is altogether a misinterpretation of her nature, and certainly an unjustifiable inference from the word of God. I never read a speech more admirable, arguments more logical, appeals more touching, than that which fell from the lips of this woman of good understanding and of a beautiful countenance. David's wrath was overcome, and he promised that nothing should be done to hurt her or Nabal.

Abigail came to Nabal, and found him adding to his folly, his brutality, and cross temper, the low and disgusting vice of drunkenness: "He was very drunken, wherefore she told him nothing, less or more." Here again her good sense breaks out. Speak to a drunken man, and you will meet with retaliations of bad usage; therefore, with great good sense and forethought, she waited till the morning, till the alcohol had all evaporated, and its effects had ceased; and when she told Nabal, his nerves unstrung by drunkenness, his health impaired by his horrid temper, the moment that he heard it, unable to stand the shock, "he became as a stone, and his heart died within him. And it came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died."

When David heard that Nabal was dead, he blessed the Lord, who had pleaded the cause of his reproach; and then it says, "David sent and communed with Abigail, to take her to him to wife." You must not suppose this was immediately on the death of Nabal; on the contrary, there is evidence that a long interval elapsed. She felt that to be the wife of a royal personage—for such he was in destiny, if not yet in fact—was more than she deserved, a dignity she *had no claim and no title to*; but nevertheless, as

David's first wife was lost or divorced, he took her she gave herself to wife. But at the same time is added—what was a stain upon all the illust characters of Old Testament scripture—he had wives than one. Polygamy was suffered, we are by reason of the hardness of their hearts, wherefo this account it is often difficult to say; but this w sure of, it was contrary to the law enacted in . dise—contrary to that law as enforced and expl by our blessed Lord; and whoever was guilty of was sin in the sight of God, and misery to the s We do not expect to find in this history of the h heart, in all its phases, a single perfect char: all are flawed, and needed forgiveness. One on magnificent contrast, was holy, harmless, undefilec separate from sinners,—that we may see how there is in each of us that needs to be forgiven much there was in Christ worthy of the imitati all mankind.

CONTRAST.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ZIPHITES. DAVID'S PROPOSAL TO AHIMELECH AND ABISHAI. COWARDICE OF AHIMELECH AND COURAGE OF ABISHAI. DAVID AND ABISHAI IN SAUL'S CAMP. DAVID'S REFUSAL TO INJURE SAUL NOW IN HIS POWER. DAVID'S TAUNTS SENT TO ABNER. SAUL AND DAVID'S DIALOGUE. THE POLICY OF GOOD FOR EVIL.

WE have the same characteristic feature brought before us in this chapter, which has been so often and in such varied shapes presented in previous chapters: it is that of David, a Christian, a Christian in spite of great defects and much alloy, persecuted; and of Saul, a relentless and ruthless persecutor, for no good reason except his jealousy of a rival, and his envy of one much superior to himself in all that dignifies, adorns, and sustains Christian and human character. "The Ziphites," an ill-natured sect, who had acted treacherously before, "came unto Saul,"—for wherever there is a bad ruler he will not be without bad people to back him in his schemes,—“saying, doth not David hide himself in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon?” that is, he is there hiding; and if now you will only go out with a sufficient body of soldiers, you will be sure to seize him, and thereby have an opportunity of putting to death one who has been

a great annoyance to you, and caused you many a sleepless night and many a troubled day. Saul took the advice of the Ziphites, "pitched in the hill of Hachilah. But David abode in the wilderness." David, in order to be thoroughly sure that he was the object of pursuit, sent out spies: they learned that "Saul was come in very deed." When David saw the place where Saul had pitched and where Saul lay, and saw also the commanding officer of his troops, namely, Abner the son of Ner, the captain of the host, and Saul lying in the trench, and the people pitched round about him, then David addressed Ahimelech the Hittite, and Abishai the son of Zeruah, and asked them if they would go down with him to see Saul, and into the very heart of Saul's camp. Ahimelech the Hittite seems to have been a very prudent, and cautious, some would say a very cowardly, man; but Abishai seems to have been attached to David, to have had an heroic spirit; evidently a man bent upon daring adventure, if it would only serve him he loved, and probably set forth his own claims to promotion. David and Abishai came to the opposite side of the valley—David and his being upon one side, and Saul and his three thousand men upon the other; and they came into the midst of the camp by night, found Saul sleeping with his spear stuck in the ground, and a cruse of water lying by his side. You will naturally say, what sleepy sentinels these must have been, to have suffered David thus unnoticed to creep into the very heart of the camp, and have the king in his power. You will find that David fully appreciated this in the sequel of the chapter; and put to Abner *some* very taunting queries, that were enough to

provoke and irritate him, as to his inattention to his military duties on so important an occasion, and especially as guarding the very life of Saul, the anointed of the Lord. We have read in heathen story of similar instances. We read of Alexander the Macedonian emperor creeping into the camp of the enemy by stealth in the midst of the night, and not being detected by a single sentinel. When David reached the camp with Abishai, they saw Saul sleeping in the trench. Abishai, evidently a determined man, and very zealous for the safety of David, said, "God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day; now therefore let me smite him; and if I do it once," as much as to say, "depend upon it I will not have to smite him a second time, for the first blow will be fatal." Now this seemed perfectly natural, justifiable, one would call it, by the laws of war; but there was another element which came into play which David recognised and acted upon. David, therefore, said, "Let the Lord smite him if he see fit to do so; or let his day come to die in battle, if that should be the case also; but the Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed." What does this show us? While we are not to come under the law of what is called passive and absolute obedience, yet we are taught here that a subject is never and on no pretence whatever to take the life of the ruler, or to attempt to do so; that is not a subject's province or a subject's prerogative at all. A ruler may be personally bad, personally vicious, personally depraved; but in all offices, whether the office in the church, or the office in the senate, or the *office in the palace*, we should look through

the *personelle*, and give reference to the office that is consecrated and anointed of God. We shall find that the true way to secure the highest and the most lasting benefits is to act upon that sacred principle. Orsini tries to assassinate: David reverently spares. David said, in order to melt Saul's heart, and show him how completely he was in his power, "Take now the spear that is at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go." He, therefore, carried off the spear and the cruse of water. Thenceforth David, with a little sarcasm, a little wit, and a little playful badinage, calls out across the valley from the opposite side to Abner, and says to him, "Art not thou a valiant man?" that is, a pretty soldier you are! What a faithful and dutiful captain you are! "and who is like to thee in Israel?" Why, you are the greatest hero that ever lived, the most wakeful and watchful sentinel that ever beat his round. "Wherefore, then, seeing thou art such a valiant man, such a sleepless sentinel; wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king? for there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord. You are worthy to die, because you have not kept the life of your master. And now that you may be convinced this is true, here is the cruse of water, and here is the spear which was at Saul's bolster, which we have taken away." I have no doubt Abner was excessively ashamed; he must have felt that he was undutiful, unfaithful, and not fit to be trusted with so important a charge. Saul, meanwhile, awakened, and hearing this voice transmitted across the valley, throwing out taunts to Abner his chief officer, and recognizing in it David's voice, said, "Is this thy voice, my son David? And David

said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king." And then David said, "Wherefore doth my lord thus pursue after his servant? for what have I done? or what evil is in mine hand? If the Lord have stirred thee up against me, let him accept an offering; but if they be the children of men,"—bad advisers and counsellors,— "cursed be they before the Lord. Now, therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth before the face of the Lord; for the king of Israel is come out to seek an insignificant thing, as a flea; and to hunt me as if I were a partridge upon the mountains." Then Saul, with that vacillation which was so characteristic of the man, said, "I have sinned, return, my son David." Saul seems to have been a man of deep feeling; he could shed tears under a keen and powerful impression; but next day he could dry his tears, and go and shed the blood of any one that stood in his way, or seemed to dim his glory, or to share in the splendour of his position; a character altogether worthy of our study, of a singular nature, and a character not unfrequent in modern times—for men can weep to-day, and go forth and show themselves the most hard-hearted to-morrow.

"David answered and said, Behold the king's spear! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it. And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the Lord. Then Saul said to David, blessed be thou, my son David; thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail." One lesson we learn from David, and that is, that the true way to conquer your bitterest enemy is not to persecute or to *retaliate*, or to abuse him, nor to say hard, and smart,

and clever, and biting things; but to heap coals of fire upon his head by being kind to him. What a pity that people have never learned the noblest policy of all, the policy of returning good for evil, and praying for them that despitefully use them. If one had no feeling, but wished to pursue the most successful policy in exterminating every private enemy, it would be the policy of doing them good in the ratio in which they do evil; and it is not in flesh and blood to resist what old Dr. Chalmers called, the omnipotence of loving kindness.

No dependence can be placed on occasional expressions of contrition.

David's conduct shows the necessity of watchfulness over our secret corruptions.

No expediency absolves from obedience to God's law.

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DAVID'S DEPRESSION. HIS RETREAT TO ACHISH. TEMPTATION.

DAVID'S exultation is followed by depression. Saul's relentless revenge was sufficient to discourage him. Yet David's God should not thus have been cast off, or his word doubted, or his power questioned. His faith failed, and he sought an asylum with Achish, and dwelt where he had only recently been driven to feign himself mad. David found no real safety in his adopted retreat, nor in a subsequent one reached through deception.

"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." God's most eminent saints are not without flaws. Men are, like David, too often blinded by passion, and in order to escape present evils they plunge into worse.

Let us not wilfully go over to situations where we may be tempted above measure; and if placed in such by the providence of God, let us pray, "Lead us not into temptation."

SAUL AND THE WITCH OF ENDOR.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WITCHES AND POISONERS—THEIR PUNISHMENT. DID SAMUEL APPEAR? DEMONIACS—DIFFICULTIES IN THE SOLUTION. OBJECTIONS TO THE COMMON EXPLANATION. PROBABLE SOLUTION. LAST TIMES.

IN the chapter we have read, we find a scene worthy of the pen—as a mere scene—of the great tragic poet; and in some degree I have no doubt suggestive to him of some of the wonderful creations of his grand genius. Saul had destroyed those who are here called witches, or familiar spirits, out of the land. It is remarkable, that the Hebrew word rendered “witch” is properly translated “a poisoner;” and as far as we know, those who were called by this name dealt in herbs and plants, some of them of great potency, to which they attached, not only what was partially just, great physical and sanitary results, but also moral, prophetic, and supernatural influences. It was a law in Israel given to Moses, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live!” That law has puzzled many, viewed in connexion with the explanation we have given of witchcraft. They say naturally enough if a witch had *been merely* a dealer in certain mysterious drugs, or had *merely pretended* to extract virtue from them, it must

have been a very severe retribution to make such offences punishable with death. One can meet this difficulty by showing that they assumed to have communications from above or below, which were mere pretensions, to pretend to which was not only hypocrisy, but in a theocracy, disloyalty to that God who was Prophet, King, and Ruler of all Israel. But the point that has perplexed many, arises from the statement here made respecting the conduct of Saul, whose degradation it is impossible to overstate. A great king, armed with great powers, cannot refrain from persecuting David, a mere stripling, like a partridge on the mountains, because he began to suspect that David would succeed or supplant him on the throne of Israel. When all his schemes failed, owing to his own nefarious conduct, he had recourse to the debasing and degrading practices which are contained in this chapter.

“ ‘Bring me up Samuel.’ Many who despise and persecute God’s saints and ministers when living, would be glad to have them again when they are gone. The whole shows that it was no human fraud or trick. Though the woman could not cause Samuel’s being sent, yet Saul’s inquiry might be the occasion of it. The woman’s surprise and terror proved that it was an unusual and unexpected appearance. Saul had despised Samuel’s solemn warnings in his lifetime, yet now that he hoped, in defiance of God, to obtain some counsel and encouragement from him, might not God permit the soul of his departed prophet to appear to Saul, to confirm his former sentence, and announce his doom? In sullen despair Saul rushed upon his doom. God sets up a few such beacons, to warn *men not to stifle convictions, or despise his word.*

But while *one* repenting thought remains, let no sinner suppose himself in this case. Let him humble himself before God, determined to live and die beseeching his favour, and he will succeed."

Had this witch of Endor, so called, power over disembodied spirits? and if so, did she really recall the disembodied spirit, that is, Samuel, from his heavenly and happy repose, to appear on this occasion to the jealous and superstitious king? There are two theories on this subject. The first is this: there did exist in ancient times a real communication between those said to be possessed of a familiar spirit and the spirits or fallen angels that are in hell. There would be nothing strange in this if we only recollect that demoniac possessions were facts until the apostolic age had expired. There is nothing strange or improbable in this solution, when we also recollect that till the resurrection of our Lord and the day of Pentecost, evil spirits, or fallen spirits, did take possession of the souls of living men, and impel them, and act upon them, speak through them, and indicate two personalities unmistakably in the same individual. If then a fallen spirit could take possession of an individual human being,—and that this occurred is plain, and can never be explained away by all the myths, and subtilities, and sophisms of German rationalism,—there is nothing very improbable in supposing that the evil spirit that had possession of the individual might communicate with evil spirits external to it; and that thus there might be a medium or link of connection between the fallen spirit in the poor demoniac, and the suffering and fallen spirits in the deep and nethermost abyss; just as between the soul of a believer inhabited by the Holy Ghost there may

be a ceaseless communion with that high and happy state where Christ the Mediator, and the spirits of just men made perfect are. If, as many believe, this witch was a woman of that stamp, inhabited by a fallen spirit, having therefore through that inhabitant communication with the rest of the fallen spirits, there would be nothing improbable that she should bring up some lost or fallen angel from his prison, and pretend it was dead Samuel; or it may be perfectly possible, without at all impugning God's character, that he should suffer the veritable Samuel to appear for a great purpose, and speak these words of rebuke and warning to the debased, infatuated, and superstitious Saul. I would not entertain this solution for a single moment were it not for the difficulty that one must feel in getting rid of what seems obvious on the face of the narrative, that it was literally Samuel that appeared in person and spoke. There is no hint of any legerdemain, or sleight of hand, or clever trick equal to explain away Samuel's distinctly asserted appearance. But, nevertheless, there are difficulties in receiving this solution, all but insuperable; these it is right to submit to the student, and leave him to form his judgment. First of all, the soul of Samuel, we know as an absolute fact, was in perfect joy and felicity in the presence of God, and amid the abodes of the blest; this being so it is highly improbable that God would answer Saul in the way that Saul himself preferred and required, seeing he had refused to answer him in the way in which God usually answered the prayers of his people. In the previous part of the chapter it is stated that the Lord did not answer Saul; that he was *departed from him*, and answered him not, "neither by

dreams, nor by vision"—that is, by the stones upon the breastplate of the high priest—"nor by prophets;" and if God did not answer him through the usual channels, is it probable that He would have given an answer through a channel that in itself was forbidden, and that Saul therefore had no right to employ?

In the next place, it looks very much as if, when Samuel, so called, appeared, Saul had worshipped him; for it is said, "He stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself;" which is the language usually applied to worship in the Old Testament Scriptures; and if it was designed as worship, I cannot conceive that the veritable Samuel would have accepted it. When John, in the Apocalypse, by mistake fell down before an angel to give him worship, the angel instantly replied, "See thou do it not; worship God:" and if this had been literally Samuel, and Saul had offered to him that worship which the language seems to imply, Samuel would have said, his faithfulness not having forsaken him, "See thou do it not; worship only God." In the next place, the spirit that appeared here and assumed to be Samuel, said, "Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?" Is it probable that a spirit in glory and in perfect felicity would state that he was troubled or disquieted by any invocation uttered in this present world? And, in the next place, if it had been Samuel, personally and truly, would he not have rebuked Saul,—seeing he mentioned one of his sins, viz., his sparing Amalek,—for daring to make use of a mode of communication with the higher and the unseen world that was altogether forbidden in *the word of God*? If this was Samuel in person, he

either came willingly or he came unwillingly. If he came willingly, then he came at the bidding of a woman that had a familiar spirit, which one can scarcely believe; if he came unwillingly, then Saul had power to intrude into God's province, and to snatch a gem from his diadem, a worshipper from the presence of his throne. When he came, it is said, he appeared in a mantle. This seems to prove the delusion. How could a spirit so come? If it was his dead body raised from the grave—he had been buried two years—all would have been corruption and decay; if it was a spirit from heaven, as the narrative indicates it was, how could he have been clad in a mantle? and if a spirit, how was he seen, and how did eyes see him and ears hear him, when we have no evidence that such is practicable, or at least usual, in the word of God?

Taking the whole series of difficulties together, I must say I am inclined to the belief that this woman was a thorough imposter; that she practised upon the senses, and the fears, and superstition of Saul with great tact and consummate talent. In the present day mesmerism will do things that will make some people's hair stand on end, and even upset some people's religious convictions; and seem to imply a power over mind that we cannot recognise as spiritual power. She may have deceived the senses of Saul—she may have played with them in the exercise of sleight of hand, and thereby have given a phantom of her own creation the appearance of reality; or she may have acted on the debased, the demoralized and frightened king,—for Saul was falling into dotage from his years, and habits, and above all, his passions, and no dotage is so bad as that created by sin,—and thus deluded

him. He was in a state of terror, bordering upon despair; and in such phrenzy the eye can almost create and people space with phantoms. What one fears in such a condition, one sometimes sees; as the boy passing through a churchyard, sees spectres of all sorts and of all shapes, his frightened fancy giving shape and form to what was shapeless and formless. So it may be here: the frightened Saul may have fancied that he saw Samuel, when it was really the phantom of his own fancy; or, taking the other solution, an invention or creation of the cunning imposter, who was trading on his fears and his superstition. What is very remarkable, however, the woman herself was not prepared to see Samuel, as if she knew that she had no power, and expected no apparition.

We read, that "when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul. And the king said unto her, Be not afraid, for what sawest thou?" The woman's first statement is, "I saw gods coming out of the earth;" she was evidently so bewildered, that she could not give a name to what she saw. Her next story is, "An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle." Suppose this was the exercise of witchcraft; suppose the first theory is the right one—that she had communication with fallen spirits—that she could do things supernatural—does this in any way affect us? In the first place, it would be no reason why we should conclude that such power exists now. There are, for instance, no demoniacs now; there is no such fact as demoniac possession; our blessed Lord seems to indicate that their reign was ended when his resurrection

took place. Perhaps there was a reason for this. Satan's whole policy has been the mimicry of God's grand system in the world; for instance, when God spake by prophets, Satan had his inspired prophets too; when God did miracles in Egypt, Satan enabled the magicians to perpetrate miracles also; when God became incarnate in the flesh, Satan mimicked that great fact, and appeared in what are called demoniac possessions, an incarnation peculiarly satanic. But the instant that Christ ascended, and the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, we find no more new demoniac possessions; and, therefore, to expect a witch now, such as we have supposed the woman of Endor, having communication with fallen spirits, inmates of the other world, is to look for what Scripture leads us to believe has entirely ceased, as demoniac possessions have ceased; and, therefore, to expect such a manifestation is unreasonable; and for any one to pretend to exercise such supernatural power is certainly to put forth a claim, not to the treatment which witches received in the days of Saul, but to bridewells or to the treadmill. One laments to read in some of the newspapers that there should be persons so utterly degraded, so demoralised, as to think there is any person that can lay a spell upon growing corn, or can exercise a charm over cattle, or sheep, or the fowls of the air, or the fish of the deep, or the health of the individual. It is arrant nonsense from beginning to end; and the proper treatment of such imposters belongs to the magistrate. One can only deplore that there are nooks of our land so impenetrable to sunshine and the sunlight, that there should lurk in them persons so wicked as to pretend

to such powers ; and persons so ignorant as to become the dupes of such pretences.

At the same time, while holding all this, there is reason to believe that in the last days, and before Satan is sent down to his own place, he will put forth a power unprecedented for the last eighteen centuries ; for we read in Matthew xxiv., that there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, who shall do such signs and wonders that if it were possible they should deceive the very elect. These words seem to indicate something above the level of the human. So we read of the Antichrist, that he comes with all lying signs and wonders. But there is no sanction here for witchcraft, as some superstitious minds believe ; there is no warrant here for having recourse to any such pretenders now ; and for any one to plead the fact related in this chapter as a reason for believing the same profession may be practised now, is to distort, and misquote, and misapply the holy word of God.

NOTES.

“ *Keeper of mine head* ; guard of my person.—*Familiar spirits, &c.* ; see Lev. xx. 27 ; Deut. xviii. 10.—*Inquired* ; not in a right spirit, or repenting of his offences.—*That hath a familiar spirit* ; one that pretended to supernatural intercourse, especially to have power over the dead. She appears to have been a priestess of Aub, one who practised the serpent-worship.—*To-morrow* ; in a short time. *With me* ; in death.”

DAVID AMONG THE PHILISTINES.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DAVID AMONG THE PHILISTINES. HOME. THE HEBREWS QUESTIONED. MAN AS HE IS AND WILL BE. DAVID SUSPECTED. ADVISED BY ACHISH TO GO HOME. DAVID RETURNS.

IN the very short history of David's conduct in the midst of the Philistines recorded here, we are reminded of the fact which transpired in a previous chapter—that when David fled from the cruel persecutions of Saul, he went for shelter where he ought not to have gone,—into the very camp, and company, and presence of the deadliest foes of his country, its constitution, and its king. No persecution experienced by David from the hands of a cruel and envious despot such as Saul was, ought for one moment to have enlisted David's energies against the home of his childhood, the country of his birth, and the people of his God. Whatever persecution we may experience at home, it is still our home; whatever inconvenience or maltreatment we encounter in the land of our fathers, still their dead dust is there, our deepest and tenderest sensibilities all cling to it and cluster there; our sympathies and our affections are all there; and no ill-treatment on the part of those that rule, or those that have power, ought ever so to exasperate a Christian as to induce him to join the enemy, and unsheath his

sword against his lawful monarch, his native country, and his early home. David, in this history, teaches us the lesson that not only is such conduct sinful, but like all sinful things, highly and permanently inexpedient. Let us never forget that the path of duty is in the long run the highest expediency; what seems to be expedient is often the most inexpedient thing in the world.

When David came to these Philistines, along with Achish, whose companionship he had made, and who seemed to be a very kindly and friendly character, he marched behind the Philistines, who were going to fight against Saul and the Israelites. The princes of the Philistines, knowing that they were marching against Israel, naturally asked the question, "What do these Hebrews here?" Achish, who seems to have been a person of some influence or authority, one of the princes or officers of the Philistines, said, "Is not this David, the servant of Saul, the king of Israel, which hath been with me these days, or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell unto me unto this day?" As much as to say, You had much better take him; he is a good character, and he will be a good servant. But how shocking that David should have been silent when he heard the proposition mooted that he must march against his country and his king with the Philistines! The Bible is a reflection of man, not as the poet and the writer of the romance would make him—a transcendental, angelic creature, but the reflection and the portrait of man as sin has left him, as grace is developing him, and as finally, when grace is turned into glory, he shall be in the land of glory and perfection. The more we know mankind, the more we

shall find in each other what needs forgiveness; and the more each knows himself, the more he will find out elements and grounds of abasement and humility in the sight of God. The princes of the Philistines, who were sagacious men, and evidently had some experience of the world, and acquaintance with the human heart, said to Achish, "Make this fellow return: depend upon it he is a traitor in the camp, and the sooner he disappears from our sight, the more convenient for him, and the better for you. Let him go to his own place; this is not his place; he has no business here. Let him not go down with us to battle, for the probability is, that he will be an adversary—for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? should it not be with the heads of these men?" We know that Saul and he have quarrelled: now here David may come and betray us, or create a panic, or do some trick that will ruin our cause, and that will be just the very thing to reconcile himself with this Saul, and we have not the least doubt that such will be his policy; and if he could only bring the heads of these soldiers or Philistines as proofs of his skill, why then Saul will be his friend, and he will be the friend of Saul, and therefore we will not consent to his professed co-operation. And what are his antecedents? We judge very much what a man will be by his antecedents. "Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?" and if we may judge by his past acts what his future will be, we are satisfied that the sooner we dismiss him and all his followers the better it will be for us."

Then Achish said to David, It is of no use going

with these lords of the Philistines. I have nothing to say against you personally; your going out and coming in before me has been always as a friend, I have found no evil in thee: but here is the vital thing—the lords of the Philistines do not favour thee, and therefore it is of no use offering services that are not acceptable. Return, go in peace, and do not pick a quarrel with the lords of the Philistines. And David said,—and here his bad character comes out,—“But what have I done? and what hast thou found in thy servant that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?” How shocking!—That I may not join with the Philistines, and fight against my king and my country! But Achish answered, not willing to give him offence, “I know that thou art good in my sight as an angel of God, notwithstanding the princes of the Philistines have said, He shall not go up with us to the battle. Wherefore now rise early in the morning and depart.” David departed—departed, I have no doubt, with a deep sense of his own sinfulness in the sight of God: and many of the troubles, disasters, afflictions, that David had to wade through to a throne, were a righteous retribution for a course of conduct not justified in the sight of God, nor before mankind.

“David waited with a secret hope that the Lord would help him out of his difficulty. But he seems to have been influenced too much by the fear of man in consenting to attend Achish. It is hard to come near to the brink of sin, and not to fall in.”

THE INCENDIARIES OF ZIKLAG.

CHAPTER XXX.

DAVID'S RETURN TO ZIKLAG. HE FINDS IT REDUCED TO ASHES. PURSUES THE INCENDIARIES. THE FAINT AND PERISHING EGYPTIAN. HE GIVES DAVID INFORMATION. GOD'S DECREES AND MAN'S MEANS. DAVID DESTROYS THE INCENDIARIES.

We have weighed and appreciated the incident, namely, that David, under the hospitality of Achish, made overtures of assisting the Philistines, into whose country he had fled, to war against his own sovereign, his country, and its interests and institutions; an offer most criminal on his part, and followed by catastrophes that were more or less the consequences and the fruits of it. When the Philistines with great good sense rejected his offer, thinking, heathen as they were, that the man that was unfaithful to the standards of his country would not be faithful to the standards of his adoption, David returned to Ziklag, a town in which he had left his family, as the place of their temporary abode. He found on his return that the Amalekites had invaded the south, had set fire to Ziklag, carried off all the women and the children in it, and all the spoil; and left nothing but the smouldering ashes of a once beautiful and prosperous city. David wept, it is said, and all that were with him, till they were tired with weeping; *thinking, probably, that matters were much worse than they were, and that the inhabitants had not*

been simply carried off, but many of them slaughtered on the field of battle. David, in his perplexity, consulted God through those *media* which were instituted by God for this very purpose; and inquired, "Shall I pursue them?" Is it hopeless to recover the captives they have taken, and the spoil which they have carried away? God answered David, and said, "Pursue; for thou shalt surely overtake them." David immediately set out; but, with the tactics of a skilful general, he left two hundred, too faint for a march, but perfectly competent to protect the baggage that they were obliged to leave behind them, by the brook Besor. After the four hundred, with David at their head, set out in pursuit of the plundering Amalekites, they accidentally, as the world would call it,—but ~~it was~~ obviously no accident, for it was the very means of fulfilling what God said would be the result, namely, the restoration of the captives to their home, and of the property to its true possessors,—found an Egyptian, faint, and sick, and hungry; they gave him, not expecting much information from him, bread and water, and exercised towards him all the rites of hospitality; in virtue of an old canon given in a portion of the Pentateuch, where the Israelites were told that ever afterwards they should show kindness to the Egyptians, because they had been captives in the land of Egypt. This captive was questioned by David, "Whence art thou?" And he said, "I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite, and my master"—that is, an officer engaged in sacking the town of Ziklag—"left me here, because I was sick, to perish on the road, unless some kind hand like yours should interpose to rescue me."

Then he explained the course that his master had pursued. And David asked, "Canst thou bring me down to this company?" and he said, "Swear unto me by God, that thou wilt neither kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring thee down to this company." And he informed them where the Amalekites were, and what route they should pursue in order to overtake them. Now, you see here a specimen of God's absolute purpose, and man's use of means being in perfect harmony. If David had said, "God has promised absolutely that I shall succeed; therefore I need not trouble myself in any respect about the means of success," he would have reasoned like many of the Antinomians in modern times; who say, "God has decreed that certain persons should be saved, therefore we have nothing to do but to stand still; and if to be saved, we shall be; and if to be lost, we shall be—it is no matter of ours." David exercised common sense, and felt that whatever God's decree was, however absolute in its nature, the use of means was his duty; and unless he used the means that Providence threw into his way, he had no right to expect the fulfilment of the promise that God had given him. David found that these Amalekites, too successful for their own comfort and safety, had carried off all the spoils, had spread their tents upon the desert, had plunged into drinking, dancing, and all sorts of excesses. He came upon them in the midst of their indulgence, slew them, which you will observe was not simply retaliation for what they had done to Ziklag. It was a duty that devolved upon every Israelite, to rid the whole land of Canaan of its *aboriginal inhabitants*, who were punished not

arbitrarily, but for flagrant sins that stained their whole history, and conduct, and character. David saved all the women and children, and restored them. But success very often makes people proud, and because the sun shines to-day we think he will shine for ever. The four hundred successful followers of David objected to giving a portion of the spoil to the two hundred that they left behind at the brook Besor. But David, with that impartiality and sense of justice by which he was always characterised, whatever his other sins and defects were, said, "No; these two hundred have done their duty in their humble sphere, as you have done your duty in a higher sphere; and the reward is to be apportioned, not according to the sphere that each fills, but according to the earnestness and the fidelity with which each fulfils the duty in that sphere in which Providence has placed him." And, therefore, he insisted that the spoil should be equally divided among all; and not only so, but he sent a portion to the rulers of the city, to each a portion according to his success.

"If, when we come off a journey, we find our abode in peace, and not laid waste, as David here found his, let the Lord be praised for it. David's men murmured against him. Great faith must expect such severe trials. But, observe, that David was brought thus low, only just before he was raised to the throne. When things are at the worst with the church and people of God, then they begin to mend.—Those who have taken the Lord for their God, may take encouragement from him in the worst times."

DAVID'S DISTRESS AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

CHAPTER XXX.

WE have seen, in the course of our reading of this chapter, how David's own indiscretion involved him in many of the consequences—the disastrous consequences—related in this book. We have seen that during his absence on an expedition in which he had no business, the Amalekites rushed to the city where he had left his family, set fire to it, and carried away captives its best and noblest inhabitants. David returned to Ziklag, knowing nothing of these things ; and when he came, he found all his own carried off by a rude and it might be a sanguinary foe ; he saw the smoke of his own city ascending in the air ; and smouldering ashes and half extinct embers all that remained of a once beautiful and beloved village ; he heard the wail of the people borne on the wind as he approached, a wail too that reproached him as in some degree the cause of all the ills that had thus overtaken them ; and lastly, in the exasperation of the moment, they determined to stone David, as if the criminal cause of all. Nothing could be worse than this, because David was not really the guilty cause of it ; though, as far as it was punishment, it was retribution for his *sins*. *But an exasperated people always look out*

for a victim on whom to wreak their vengeance. How often have we read of this in history! let the harvest fail, let there be a blight in the crops, let there be a depreciation in the currency, let something go wrong in the economy of a kingdom,—an infatuated, ignorant, and exasperated mob must have some one on whom to lay the guilt and inflict the punishment as the cause and the source of all; and therefore they select some statesman, or cabinet, or parliament, or something else; and show how infatuated is human nature under wrongs it did not expect; and how prone to seek revenge where no guilt is properly and justly to be attributed. But in David's case we find all the sufferings he endured were the direct result of his own conduct. He had no right to offer his services to the Philistines; he had no right to go to the land of the Philistines at all; one false step was the cause of all. This is a very important lesson. How often do we find one wrong step lead to a life of continuous disaster! Must there not be something intensely evil in sin, when one incidental act perpetuates its results through all the currents and channels of the longest lifetime? What does this teach us? The path that seems the most expedient to us, if it be not sustained by living principle, is the most inexpedient of all; whereas the path of principle, let it seem never so crooked, never so up-hill, never so beset with perils and impossibilities, is in its issue sunshine, unmingled and lasting success. A straight line is always the nearest route to any given point. The path that principle prescribes may be a hard, a rugged, or a steep one; but there is on it what there is not amid the meteor lights of a *false expediency*—the blessing, the presence, and the

direction of God. As the sailor steers his course, not by a light suspended on the bow, that moves with the vessel, nor by a light on the mast, but by the lighthouse, or by a star in the sky, or by the needle on his deck, and steers securely ; so a Christian is to direct his course, not by the meteoric lights of human expediency, but by the lodestars in the sky ; and so steering, seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all the rest will be added unto him. I know it does not seem so ; and it may be difficult to convince a worldly man that it is so. I have seen a boat rowed against the rapid current in a mist ; the rower supposed that at every stroke of his oar he was moving himself and his vessel up the stream ; the mist lifts away, he looks to the landmarks on shore ; and though he seems to be going upwards, and onwards, towards his home, he is really being carried every moment to the rapids, and on the very verge of destruction. It is thus with him who takes the path of expediency ; he seems to be making progress along the route that is best ; but when the mist of ignorance is lifted from his mind he sees that, instead of making progress in the right way, he is, in spite of all his efforts, making progress in the wrong ; and that unless arrested inevitable destruction must be the issue. Do what is just, and the universe will waken new plaudits for you ; do what is wrong, and there is a law greater than man which comes into play, that sin is ruin, unhappiness now, misery hereafter ; that righteousness is joy, and happiness, and peace.

We see in David's distress and suffering, that God chastens his people. If you be a Christian, and do *what is wrong*, God loves you too much to let you

alone. We deprecate the chastisement, because no chastisement seems for the present joyous, but rather grievous; but if you have done wrong, and if chastisement has followed, what does that show? That God so loves you that he will not let you have your own way. When we take a retrospect of all the way that God has led us, its outs and its ins, its ups and its downs, its clouds and its sunshine, we shall be constrained at the last day to thank God from the very bottom of our hearts, that here he crossed us, that there he turned us back, that elsewhere he laid us upon a sick-bed; and we shall find that those acts, which to us were so unwelcome, were as essential for our everlasting safety as that a cross should have been raised on Calvary, or that the Son of God should have shed his precious blood upon it. Again, when God thus afflicted David, and brought him into great distress, and showed him all the consequences of his own conduct, he was teaching by that strange and mysterious biography, that in this world there is no lasting rest or permanent home for the people of God. Are we not—I appeal not to fact, but to experience—very prone to select some sweet and sunny spot in life, or in the world, or in our relationship to it, or in our possessions derived from it; and to say in a moment of forgetfulness, “This is my rest, here now I wish to rest, and this sunshine never to be shaded; I shall be satisfied to live here for ever and ever?” We need to learn that here is an awful and deceptive delusion.

How often have we found that the very day after you had chosen this sunny spot, on which you had *begun to raise a shelter and a home, something hap-*

pened—as the world would call it—some incident, or accident, that disturbed the whole, and revealed that there is no tree so fresh and beautiful in which there is no worm at its root; no gold that is not liable to corrosion; no good in this world that has not the accompanying shadow of uncertainty, or trouble, or evil! God teaches us in the pestilence that walks at night; in the graves that are opened every day; in sacked towns and smoking hamlets; in all the ills that we grapple with; in all the griefs that gnaw the heart; in the dissatisfaction and disquiet that we cannot explain, and we know not whence it comes nor whither it goes,—by all these stern, painful instructors, God is teaching us that this world is not our rest; and yet that all its troubled surf must be rushing somehow or some way, into some bright and happy bay, where there is no storm, nor grief, nor trouble, nor sorrow, former things past away, and the reign of holiness, and happiness, and peace, begun. David needed to learn this; he was constantly building his nest upon some choice bough, and as often finding that bough cut down; and even when he came to an illustrious throne, a throne of unprecedented glory, the broken-hearted monarch found so little rest of heart, that he cried from it, “Oh, that I had wings like a dove, that I might flee away and be at rest!” This world is not our rest; it is still true, “There remaineth a rest for the people of God.” Such then was David’s distress, deep and painful depression, dissatisfaction with himself, probably bitter remorse for the infatuated course he had pursued; and all the recollections of the past, the sins of the present, the sufferings of the people, the loss of his family, the smoking

embers that were around him, the wreck and ruin of his property, made him bitterly and deeply distressed.

But David, notwithstanding, encouraged himself in the Lord his God. What a strange experience is a Christian's! the very place from which his afflictions come is that to which he flees for comfort; the black cloud that contains the judgments, holds also in its fleecy folds the light and the sunshine that can cheer and comfort in the midst of it. It is well and beautifully said by the poet,—

“Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercies, and shall break
In blessings on your head.”

The clouds that you dread are but the springs of the consolations that are to cheer and sustain you. David, therefore, presenting in this a beautiful precedent for us, did not, when he needed encouragement, go like Saul to the music of the harp, or to the witch of Endor; or, like the world, to the excitements of intoxication or of the gambling table; but when distressed, greatly distressed and depressed in mind, he looked higher than the world, higher than its amusements, higher than church, or sacrament, or priest, or prelate; he would be satisfied with no streams of comfort whose spring was not God, the living God; and therefore it is beautifully said, “David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”

In this respect, David's source of encouragement must be our source of encouragement also; I speak here to the depressed—and who is not sometimes depressed? Are there not times in the experience of us *all when we become downcast, depressed, and melan-*

choly? we cannot say why; we are not in debt, which would be a just cause of melancholy; we have committed no crime, which would be another cause; and yet at times it seems as if the whole sky were wrapped in sackcloth, and the whole earth clothed in crape; and a sense of desolation comes over the human heart, deep, impenetrable, and lasting, that no medicine can remove, except that divine medicine and sacred balm to a heart diseased, which David applied to his, and which, thanks be to David's God, is equally applicable to ours. But when such seasons of depression come, what are they? The aching that you feel in the heart is a call to look higher; the aching and empty void you are conscious of within is an admonition that none but God can fill it. That man who in his desolation and depression looks less to those mysterious things called nerves, and still less to the empirical prescriptions that pretend to minister to the mind, and which only minister to the body; and looks up to God, and seeks from him his presence, the light of his countenance, the rays of his glory, to break upon his darkness, will, like David, in the circumstances described in this chapter, begin not to say, but to sing, "Why art thou cast down, oh, my soul? why art thou disquieted within me? still trust in God, for I shall praise him who is the health of my countenance and my God." What a blessed thought is it for the encouragement of all such depressed, and gloomy, and disconsolate persons, that this God whom David had recourse to, and in whom he found comfort, is not a God for kings, for patriarchs, for princes, or for captains only; but for all that put their trust in him! *God is as near to the obscurest and meanest individual*

upon earth as he is to the cherubim that worship before him, or to the archangel that shall sound the last trump, and announce a dissolving world. What we need is, more profoundly to realize this blessed truth,—that despondency may lift its heart to God, and God will give it light; that the weeping eye can look up to him, and God will wipe away its tears. He is so tender, that he will wipe away the orphan's first tear; he is so royal, that he can marshal all the hosts of the sky. Therefore, drooping one, desponding one, depressed and discouraged one, encourage thy heart by bringing it under the sunshine of the countenance of thy God.

Of David it is said, "He encouraged himself in the Lord his God." His God is also my God. I want the reader, if possible, to individualise this thought. We can easily say, God is *our* God, but it needs grace to enable us to say, God is *my* God. Weigh well that monosyllable *my*: all the attributes of the living God mortgaged to me; his wisdom is as much mine as it is any one's to guide me; his power is mine to protect me; his mercy is mine to pardon me; his glory is mine eternally to receive me. He that can say, My warehouse, my counting-house, my bank, my ships, my estates, is poor indeed; but he that can say, in that grief that can find no sympathy, in that sorrow which is too big for tears, in that desolation in which is left neither a taper upon earth, nor a star in the sky, from that sick bed where the heart seems beating the last steps of its funeral march to the grave,—he that can lift up that heart, and say, Thou art my God; has riches no thief can steal, an estate that no time can waste. The landlord must be taken from his property, or his property *must* be taken from him; but that Christian who has

God as his God has an investiture that lasts for ever, for neither life nor death shall be able to separate him from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. But charmed as you ought to be with such a magnificent property, you ask, How is it reached? The telescope that sees the property is simple, child-like faith; the observatory, standing upon which you can see it, is any rock, or hill, or highway, or valley, or sick-bed. The parties that may claim an interest in the property are the poorest, the obscurest, the neediest, the most crushed and despised, who have nothing left but grace to lift up their hearts and cry, "God, my God!" Let me ask at this point, Is this God yours? Some one will say, It is a very nice story—it is a very fine picture. It is reality; it is either monstrous blasphemy, or it is the very truth of the living God. That man who can go home and bury his heart in his bank, in his warehouse, his money, his bills, or his estates, and forget, or ignore, or neglect these thoughts, incurs a criminality that the blood of Christ may forgive, but that nothing else can.

David not only says, God is my God, but we may suppose he encouraged himself also in God's relationships to him, and in his relationship to God. How do we begin the very first prayer that we are taught in infancy to utter? "Father,"—beautiful thought! the fatherhood of God. What next? "Our Father"—only second to that thought, the brotherhood of all believers—"Our Father, which art in heaven." The third thought, "heaven," the everlasting and blessed home. And when we can say, "Our Father," we may be sure that every petition in that *prayer shall be turned into performance in our expe-*

rience. What did David say in his Psalm? "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." That is true—literally true; it is not a fancy, a figure, nor a poem, but strict literal truth. "I shall not want." You say, What? I have taken God to be my shepherd; I have believed in him, I have prayed to him, I have leaned on him, but many a thing have I wanted. Yes, many a thing you have wanted that you wished for. If an affectionate mother were to give the child the beautiful knife that it longs for, charmed with its brightness, it would injure itself. And God treats men as children, only of a larger growth. If you were to have always what you wish, the misery of the lost would be enviable in comparison of yours. I have sometimes thought that we shall hesitate, when the whole veil is removed from the past through which we have come, whether to praise God most for the things he has refused which we have earnestly asked, or for the things he has given when we have lightly and carelessly begged for them. When you say, therefore, I have wanted many things, I answer, you shall not want what is truly good and expedient for you. Often, in the very sense of want, there has been the choicest, the most lasting, and productive blessing. Perhaps your experience is something of this kind,—all the joys that once sparkled in your air are gone; every light in your horizon is quenched, those that were the treasures of your home have passed away into the shadow of the grave. You think of unreturned affection, of unrealized expectations; of pleasures you have found pains, of pinching poverty; you are surrounded by sicknesses, you are penetrated by sorrows, legions of life's ills seem to rush upon you,

till you cry like David, "All thy billows have gone over me," and you are tempted to say, like Martha, "Lord, if thou hadst only been here, it had not been so." But you soon discover that the Lord was there; in the darkest and the dreariest moments of that experience the Lord was there, sweetening what you felt, sanctifying what he left, substituting himself for what he took away, till you are constrained to own that your fastest tears reflected the brightest sunshine, that your bitterest moments were your sweetest; and never was God so near, nor your Christian progress so real, as when you were constrained to own that all seemed to have forsaken you, and God himself appeared to have forgotten you. All his waves have indeed swept over you, but then each wave you discover wafted you nearer to the shores of eternal day. When you can say, "God is my God, and therefore I shall not want;" and when you can say still more, "God is my Father," there is the transposition of the key-note of all creation. When a man feels that God is his Father, everything is revolutionised to him. If I have the feeling or the suspicion that God hates me, that he waits to punish me, that he hangs upon my steps to destroy me, I must be the victim of ceaseless misery: but when I know that God is my Father, I am certain that he will never leave me, that he will never forsake me; I am sure that life's bitterest sorrows are meted out by a Father's hand, and that the heart's greatest grief has been in his bosom before it had its mission to take up its abode even for a single moment in my heart. A German writer says very beautifully that all the sorrows and the griefs of a Christian should be *heimweh*, that is, should be home-sickness; in other

words, that sickness is from home, that affliction is from home, and that grief, that loss, that bereavement is to carry us home ; till, at the last day, when we arrive at that blessed home whose roof-tree shall never be removed, and whose sunshine shall never be clouded, and whose warm fire on its hearthstone shall never be quenched, and whose light shall never go out, we shall bless God that we took encouragement in him as our God and our Father, for goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life, and now we dwell in his home for ever and for ever.

The last thought or ground of encouragement which I shall specially urge in David's case, as in our case also : David encouraged himself, where we also may encourage ourselves, in the providence of God. Here, again, we want faith to look clearly, trust implicitly, grasp firmly, what is a great and precious truth ;—it is this, that God is here, there, and everywhere, ruling, governing, controlling, directing all. Our God is not a Being insulated from the world, far back in the depths of infinite space, or of eternal ages, unconcerned about all things that transpire below. The Church of Christ is not the epicurean sty ; it is still less the cold school of Zeno and the stoic. God is not too great to rule over little things : God is not too happy in himself to care that his children suffer : such a God was not David's God, such a God is not our God ; and, rather than believe in a God that minds great things, and does not condescend to little things, I would plunge into absolute atheism, and say with the fool, as really greater wisdom, There is no God at all. But our God is not a God of a distant star, nor a God of royal reserve, *nor a God of enthroned pomp ; but my Father and your*

Father, descending to all life's little things, sanctifying, sweetening, and comforting ; taking as much care of the humblest wild field-flower as he does of the orbs of the sky, or of the angels that sentinel his throne :—

“ Teach us, O God ! that not a leaf can grow
Till life from thee within it flow ;
That not a grain of dust can be,
O Fount of being ! but from thee.”

We may take courage, also, and be cheered in the retrospect of God's past dealings. Almost every calamity we feared in the future has not been one half so terrible in experience as it was in anticipation. Have you not sometimes found the calamity that, anticipated, overwhelmed and crushed you with forebodings, pass away, or rather over, gentle as a cloud, or softly as a ripple ? In sailing on the ocean in a heavy gale, or in a tempestuous storm, have you not sometimes seen a wave coming, curling its edge almost up to the sky, and your impression has been that the poor craft in which you were must go down below it, and that there was not another minute for your existence ? But, by a beautiful law, it has curled round and round till it has quietly crept away beneath the bow of the vessel, while she gracefully mounted over it, and reached almost a great calm. It is so with all those waves and billows that we dread in the future ; when they come to the trial, you will find that there is a God with you then, as there was a God with you in the past, and that neither wind nor wave can scathe him whose lode-star is “ the bright and morning star,” whose comfort is the word of God, whose trust is God, the living God. Take courage, therefore, in the retrospect of the past. Take courage, in the next place, in all that God has

written in his own word of promise, of prophecy, of precept, of disclosure of himself; and, in your deepest and most poignant distress, like David, encourage yourselves in God.

And, lastly, let us encourage ourselves in God for life's every-day duties. I state what may seem perhaps untrue—that it is easier to die a martyr at the stake than it is to live an exemplary Christian always and everywhere; and that we need as much divine encouragement to tread the floor of every-day life as we need to fulfil those magnificent and luminous duties that earn the *éclat* and the admiration of all mankind. Many a man would make a splendid martyr, who makes a very questionable and equivocal every-day Christian. We may not be called upon to stupendous sacrifices, but we are called upon, every day to temptations within, to temptations without, to suffering, to sacrifice; and if you cannot run with the footmen, how shall you run with the horsemen; if you cannot do beautifully life's little duties, how will you perform life's greater and more heroic ones? By encouraging ourselves in God we shall, by the inspiration of his Spirit, and the blessing of his grace, do what is so difficult, life's little duties, well; and when called upon to face life's great duties and trials, we shall see that He who is with us in the first will be with us in the last, never leaving, never forsaking us.

SAUL, THE SUICIDE.

I. SAMUEL XXXI.

REVIEW. ELI. SAMUEL. DAVID. SAUL. ENVY., SUICIDE.

THIS is the last chapter of one of the most interesting and instructive books contained in the Old Testament Scriptures. We have seen in the course of our perusal of this book the weak indulgence of Eli, by which and through which his house went to ruin, and his sons met with a premature and a disastrous end. We have that weak and sinful indulgence of the aged priest contrasted in most beautiful relief with the growing and deepening piety of Samuel, the prophet and priest of God, dedicated to his service from his infancy, and adorning every act of his life and every service that he rendered with whatsoever things were beautiful, and just, and honest, and lovely, and of good report. We find, in the succeeding part of the book, what is carried on in the Second Book of Samuel, the dawning virtues and excellences of David, the root and the offspring of the Great David, the True Beloved, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world—contrasted again most luminously and most strikingly with the deepening shadows of the vices, the superstition, and the folly of Saul. We have seen the whole history of that remarkable monarch; and no one can have read it without being

struck first by the evidences of its reality, and secondly by this great lesson,—that whilst the ways of Samuel and of David—with all their incidental side-paths, and all their occasional windings and wanderings, from which, however, they returned—were on the whole paths of pleasantness and peace, the ways of transgressors, whether royal ones or commoners, are increasingly hard.

Saul in this chapter meets that end which was worthy, if I may use the expression, of such a ruler. His first days were full of promise—he seemed to be the anointed of the Lord; within as pure, holy, and spiritual as externally he excelled the rest of his countrymen. By-and-by, however, one passion gets access to his spirit, the most grovelling and debasing passion that can possibly occupy the human heart—namely, envy; the most mean and foolish in itself, and often the most disastrous in its issues: for what is envy? not a determination that is worthy of a man, to rise to the height of another's excellence, but that mean passion which ignores its own influence, and tries to pull down a successful rival to its own low level. He saw in David excellences which he would not imitate, and therefore he envied David his excellence, his prosperity, his progress. The issue of it was, that his heart became so diseased, his spirit so troubled, that all the splendours of a palace could not lighten its gloom, and all the dignities of a throne could not comfort him; while David prospered and was blessed of God, and praised by his countrymen. David approaches Saul, and with the sweet sounds of his harp lays, only for a season,—for that was all the influence they could exert,—the troubled spirit of the infatuated monarch: we find that monarch repaying David's

kindness with successive but unsuccessful attempts to take his life. We then discover Saul beginning to taste the bitterness of his own course by being cast off of God, and not answered when he consulted the usual oracles and means of information. In this state he has recourse to the very thing which he himself had at one time most justly condemned—witchcraft; he consulted an infamous and a superstitious woman, who pretended to have control over spirits above, or to evoke them from the vasty deep, and to find through these sources solutions of difficulties which could not be found through the teaching or the instruction of God. And, at last, we find the degraded monarch in a worse position than the King Lear of the great dramatic poet,—cast forth from happiness and peace with God into the bleak desert of exile and estrangement from him; and worse than the winds of heaven, and the storm, and rain, and snow, his own fierce passions, his own impetuous depravities and propensities buffeting him hither and thither, till his career is closed by his enemies overcoming him, and with him all the hosts of Israel; and he who lived a depraved and a wilful sinner, dies a miserable and unhappy suicide. Thus we close the biography of Saul, who, with his armour-bearer and his three sons, are slain upon the mount Gilboa; and among those three sons was one really excellent, Jonathan. It would not have been sufficient chastisement to Saul if he had seen Jonathan spared, but he lived long enough to see his sons slain, the banners of his country trampled in the dust, the uncircumcised rejoicing over the ruin; and, after he fell, his head was cut off, his armour was placed in the house of the heathen god, and he himself buried with the burial of

the meanest and obscurest Philistines, under a tree at Jabesh, by his own subjects, who deplored his fate, whilst they could not but reprobate his character and his crimes.

May God teach us by such beacons to avoid the crooked, tortuous, and in the end unhappy and disastrous ways of sin, and to pursue with unfaltering footsteps those ways of righteousness which alone are ways of pleasantness and of peace.

“We cannot judge of the spiritual or eternal state of any by the manner of their death; for in that, there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked. Saul, when sorely wounded, and unable to resist or to flee, expressed no concern about his never-dying soul, but only desired that the Philistines might not insult over him, or put him to pain, and so he became his own murderer. As it is the grand deceit of the devil to persuade sinners, under great difficulties, to fly to this last act of desperation, it is well to fortify the mind against it by a serious consideration of its sinfulness before God, and its miserable consequences in society. But our security is not in ourselves. Let us seek protection from Him who keepeth Israel.”

A ROYAL BIOGRAPHY.

I. SAMUEL XXXI.

THIS is the close of one of the most remarkable biographies contained in the whole Word of God. We have traced its every winding from its commencement to its close—a close most disastrous, and very unexpected, if we were to judge of it by the commencement of the reign of this remarkable man. His life is replete with lessons; every winding and current in it has its special instruction. Sometimes we are warned by wrecks; at other times we are guided by beacon lights; at all times the careful and prayerful student of his character will find a lesson for the present, information about the past, and encouragements for duty in the future that yet lies before us. The fact is, there is no portrait sketched in Scripture that has not its living original somewhere; there is no one fact recorded of any which is destitute of practical and personal instructions at all times for those that will be content to study it. Let us glance at some of the characteristic traits in the character of this monarch; and see what instruction we can gather by God's blessing from so strange, in some passages so inexplicable, and in all so fitful a biography.

First of all, he seems to have been selected for a throne because of numerous personal and remarkable excellences, which shone forth with rare magnificence and brightness in the eyes of Israel. He was obedient as a son, dutiful as a subject, unassuming in his conduct, impressive in his personal appearance, and of all men he seemed the most fit to be invested with royal prerogatives, and to occupy that throne which the children of Israel insisted should be erected in the midst of them. The beginning of his reign was extremely prosperous; wherever he unsheathed his sword it was to carve out victory and renown; wherever he looked around him at home he had loyal, contented, and obedient subjects; and if ever a monarch had a fair start for a prosperous reign, in the best of circumstances, under the most propitious promises, it was surely Saul, the first and great monarch of Israel. But when we come to trace the course of that reign, we find so fair and beautiful a sunrise gilding the whole horizon round, and the whole sky above, and the whole land below, gradually darken, cloud gathering on cloud, until he that rose so fair set amid banks of dark, tempestuous, and stormy clouds, and ultimately died by his own hand, a warning to Israel and a judgment upon himself. If we watch the whole of Saul's character, we shall find that his radical defect was the total absence of personal religion; and no excellency, however good, will stand the wear, and tear, and ordeal of life unless it be animated, and quickened, and sustained by real and living religion. There is not throughout his whole career one single proof of an abiding sense of responsibility to God. He consciously lived in the eyes of *his subjects*; he never lived in the eye of God. He

sought what would be popular; he attempted what would be expedient; he never inquired, is this right and dutiful in the sight of a just and a heart-searching God? There being this absence of real religion in Saul, we shall find that he becomes the subject, or rather the victim, of a series of injurious influences which a Christian would have triumphed over; which a mere professor, such as Saul, was sure to be overwhelmed by. Let us see what these were. First of all we find the whole tone of the man materially deteriorated and altered by the single fact of his sudden and unexpected elevation to a great and popular throne. He was raised from a humble to a lofty position; the consequence was, he felt that giddiness of head which such unexpected elevation is too sure to generate: moral, like material elevation, especially when it happens to be sudden, is calculated to disturb the balance of all the moral and the mental powers, and to make one feel that the high places of the world, however sunny, are what Scripture justly pronounces them—the slippery places of the earth. The feet that would have trod with beauty the lower levels of ordinary life, totter, stumble, and give way when called upon to tread those loftier levels, which are the portion only of the few, and are successfully and triumphantly trod by only a handful here and there in many generations. Let us not seek high things: we all think of the splendour of the place, and shut our eyes to its perils, because to flesh and blood it is so gratifying; but we conceal deliberately from ourselves the more than neutralizing perils with which it is beset, till, I solemnly believe, if we saw the aches, and the sorrows, *and the griefs that are under royal purple and kingly*

diadems, we should thank God from the whole heart that he has neither given us poverty nor riches, but food convenient for us. The equator of the world, in its moral as well as in its physical significance, is its happiest and its healthiest form. I have no doubt that, on the whole, more real happiness is tasted by the middle classes than in either extreme, and that never can we sufficiently thank God in that he has given us to owe no man anything but to love one another; and has given us daily bread; and, above all, godliness with contentment in the midst of it, which is not only great gain, but great happiness also.

The second element which seems to have worked disastrously upon Saul was his great success at the commencement of his reign. We are all prone at the beginning of an enterprise, whatever it may be, to covet great success; in after life we learn to thank God that he was pleased to withhold it. Sudden elevation often precedes a sudden fall; the success that is achieved by prayer, and by painstaking, is likely to be permanent. The success that seems to leap like a lightning flash from heaven, and to irradiate us at once with its splendour, is of all forms of success the most perilous. Saul felt it so; and he instantly began to think that what was the expression of providential goodness was God's just recognition of his righteous deserts, and instead of thanking God that he had blessed him in spite of his demerits, he began to look up to God as giving him only what he deserved. Hence he himself took the praise, and found in the issue that whoever wreaths round his own brow a single wreath that belongs to the sovereign diadem of God, wreaths round that brow a circlet of thorns that

pierces with many aches, and proves not a blessing, and often a curse to him that wears it.

The third fact that exercised injurious influence upon Saul was his belief that he had talents for functions which he had no proper connection with, and ought never to have intruded on. We find at the commencement of one of the great conflicts in which he was to play a part, that he thought as king he was also entitled to be the prophet and the priest of his country. In the first capacity he attempted to proclaim what was God's mind; in the second capacity to offer sacrifices, which were not royal but sacerdotal acts under the Jewish economy. This intrusion into the office of the prophet and the priest by one who was only anointed to the office of the king was a great sin on the part of Saul—an outburst of intolerable and criminal pride, and it most justly provoked upon the head of him who was thus guilty, some of those severe and terrible retributions that necessarily follow. Sin may tread the earth for a little with a foot of velvet, but retribution will always strike with a hand of steel, and Saul lived to feel it so. Saul, having become proud and puffed up by his sudden elevation; having become self-righteous, imputing to his own merit what was the expression of God's mercy—those great things and good things that happened to him; having in the exercise of these sinful feelings rushed to the altar, and seated himself in priest's as well as prophet's chair, which was blasphemy against God and the violation of the laws of his country,—the joy that he felt at the commencement of his reign began to fade, and a settled and inveterate melancholy to take possession of his royal heart; and in the midst of a palace,

and seated on a throne, he became the most miserable, and the most wretched of mankind. The fact is, no man who occupies a dignified and lofty position very long derives much gratification from it. The toy delights the child to-day, but to-morrow, when the gilding wears off, it casts it away with disdain. The crown and sceptre are beautiful to day, covered with charms most fascinating to the natural heart; but nature's greatest luxuries and life's highest dignities, the one tasted and the other worn long enough, lose all their gilding, and we come to regard them as common things, no longer able to minister the satisfaction and repose which we originally derived from them. So Saul felt; melancholy seems to have settled on his heart; his spirits seemed to have become depressed; and from a throne he looks round him, if peradventure he may find in his royal prerogatives, or in his wide-spread realms, any one spring out of which he can drink one cup of living water, and be refreshed and happy again. He hears, or is told, of one means of getting his melancholy removed. David, the son of Jesse, was a musician as well as a poet: he sends for David; David comes; he has the genius that could penetrate the depths of Saul's heart; and he had the minstrel finger that could waken the sleeping tones from the harp-strings that would carry on their wings consolation into the depths of that heart; and he so exercises his skill and displays his genius, that Saul's melancholy is dissipated, his spirits are revived, and he is happy and himself again. But Saul felt, what we must feel in analogous circumstances, that such peace is not the consolation that we need, but only the *calm that*, like an opiate, lasts for a day, and on its

cessation leaves consequences only more disastrous than the disease it deadens. How often do the men of this world—how often do we all, for there is none who is free from guilt in this matter—when through physical, or moral, or mental influences depressed, and dejected, or, as we call it, out of spirits, fly to this resource to revive us, to that scheme to cheer our hearts, and perhaps for the nonce we obtain the refreshment that we sought after. But that refreshment is transient, and the reaction that follows it leads to a deeper and a more settled melancholy than before. How truly do we describe the world's happiness, when we state the excitement of the London spring is followed by the melancholy of the London autumn; and the melancholy of the London autumn finds its only relief in the Opera of the London winter: and life is thus spent in successive rounds, the heart sinking to-day, fleeing to broken cisterns to-morrow, still more depressed and unsettled again, and going back to the old broken cisterns again, until in some happy moment some one reminds the unhappy sufferer of a fountain of living water for those broken cisterns, of a music sweeter than David's harp can waken—the music of righteousness and peace that have met together, and mercy and truth that have kissed each other; until we find in living religion, in lifting up our hearts to God, in the study of his Word, in meditation on his will, in the knowledge of the Saviour, not calm, but consolation; not a transient stimulant, but a permanent and all-pervading peace, which the world cannot give, and cannot take away. Thus Saul fled when he felt distressed, not to David's Lord, who *could have given him comfort*, but to David's harp.

which could give but a momentary calm; the sequel of his life shows how unsatisfactory it was. After being tossed from one place to another, un comforted, unsatisfied, and unsettled, he seems, at last, to have made an appeal to God. He drew near to him, sought counsel from him, lifted up his heart, and prayed. He is almost the only instance of prayer offered to God on earth, and rejected by the Hearer of prayer. Saul's sins seem to have so hardened his heart, and so displeased his God, that in his case, even in this present life, was fulfilled the most awful passage probably in God's holy Word, where he tells us, "Because ye have set at nought all my counsels, and would none of my reproof, I will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me, but they shall not find me."

Saul, disappointed in receiving an answer from God, evidently plunged into despair,—a despair generated by his own unholy and unsanctified career,—determines to extort from heaven by force, or to win from heaven by fraud, an answer which God would not give him in the ordinary way in which he usually answered the prayers of his people. His last resource was indeed a desperate one. "Seek me out a woman," he said, "that hath a familiar spirit, that I may prevail on her to bring up from the dead one whom, when living, I despised, whom, when dead, I would give my crown that I might hear one word of comfort or of consolation from his lips before I depart, and be no more seen." Saul knew that of all the sins that God visited with special retribution, necromancy, or seeking to hold communion with the dead, was one of the worst, and the most sorely

punished. He too, in the commencement of his reign, had swept from the land all that professed to hold intercourse with familiar spirits: but now that God had refused to hear him,—not because God's mercy was exhausted, but because Saul's cup of iniquity was full,—he resolved to perpetrate one of the greatest sins that a subject of the Jewish theocracy could commit, and to call in a woman who professed, as an impostor, to have communion with the dead, that she might secretly bring from heaven tidings that Samuel, if living, would have told him respecting the future, and his own destiny or doom in that future. He accordingly secured the services of the witch of Endor, who professed to be able to give him that information which he wanted. I have read with great care the whole of that remarkable chapter, I have read all that I could find that has been written upon it, and my impression is still strong that this woman had no power whatever over the unseen world; that it probably was not Samuel, though, from the literal acceptance of the narrative, it seems to be Samuel who appeared, but that some fallen spirit, in just retribution on Saul for his sins, and not Samuel brought from the dead, spoke those awful prophecies of ruin which were subsequently fulfilled. For, in the first place, I cannot conceive that God would suffer an infamous woman, such as was the witch of Endor, to disturb the repose of one of his sainted and happy dead. Secondly, when Samuel, as he is called, appeared, the woman herself evidently was struck and overwhelmed with terror, seeing an answer such as she knew perfectly well she was unable to command. The only difficulty that lies in the way of this solution is that *the sacred narrative* speaks of Samuel appearing,

Samuel predicting what should be the doom of Saul. But one can easily suppose that God may have suffered a fallen spirit to appear on that occasion, and to have made known the judgment that was soon to overtake the guilty monarch, without admitting that this woman had any power whatever over spirits that were in hell, or spirits that were in heaven, or over the cold ashes that lay in the cold and the silent grave. But whatever was the nature of the apparition which we have previously discussed, this we know, that the being who assumed to be Samuel predicted to Saul what actually occurred—namely, that in a day or two he himself and his sons would be numbered with the dead. Now, mark in this strange incident how clearly we find illustrated an experience not uncommon still—that scepticism has its reaction in superstition, and that a life of utter immorality will in its last moments have recourse to the most arrant fanaticism in order to find peace or the hopes of acceptance from God. Schlegel, the great German historian, lived a violent sceptic—he died a Roman Catholic fanatic. There is a living illustration of this in one who, under the guise of philanthropy and humanity, founded in Scotland institutions for what he called the regeneration of the human race, who has preached infidelity and scepticism under the flimsy veil of a great and transcendental philosophy, and is now a devotee to spiritualism, professing to call down Milton and Shakspeare from their abodes in order to reveal to him what are the facts and phenomena of the present, and what is the nature of that futurity to which he is going : fourscore years of vulgar scepticism ending in a few remaining months of the most intense *and humbling* fanaticism ; as if to show how truly the

wise man has spoken when he tells us that only the paths of righteousness are paths as permanent as they are full of pleasantness and peace.

After this incident in the history and life of Saul, we find his end drawing near, soon to issue in a disastrous close. He never seems to have had one lingering lowly sense of sin, one moment of deep abasement of heart. He was proud, self-righteous, vain, puffed up with his unexpected success, rendered conceited at rare and unusual elevation in social life, but finding the glitter fade, the gilding wear off, the sceptre after all but a toy, his crown after all but a plaything, a palace after all ministering no more to an aching heart than a mud hut, he seeks comfort and finds none. He has recourse to music; it calms for a moment, but fails to give permanent peace: he then ventures to have recourse to God; but so often has he grieved and vexed God that God refuses to answer him. He flees in desperation to the witch of Endor, the woman that has a familiar spirit. He finds in his painful experience that all are broken cisterns, that the very water that they placed at his lips was nauseous, bitter, unsatisfactory, and that there was something in his whole moral nature so diseased and radically wrong that unless some vast revolution could take place within, he could have no peace in this world, and no prospect of happiness beyond it.

Does not this remind us to ask ourselves, where is the source of our chief joy, of our truest and our deepest happiness? Take the sunshine of the hour, and be thankful for it; eat the bread that God has given you with a thankful heart; do not be ascetic because you will not be epicurean; but never suppose

that there is any tree on earth whose leaves can heal, or whose fruit can feed you, or that there is any spring that can be dug in the rock that can give you living water; for you will find what all past experience amid tears of blood has often been constrained to own, that upon all life's honours, upon all life's riches, upon all this world's greatness, there is written, legible to the eye of faith, if not to the pride of life, "Whoso drinketh of this water shall thirst again;" there is written, however, upon that living spring which has been opened in the world's desert, inexhaustible as the ocean fulness from which it is fed—"The water that I will give him shall be in him a well of living water, springing up into everlasting life."

DAVID'S LAMENTATION FOR SAUL AND JONATHAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE AMALEKITE'S STORY. ITS CONTRADICTIONS. HIS PUNISHMENT.
THE BOW AND ARROW. THE BOOK OF JASHER. FUNERAL
ORATION ON SAUL AND JONATHAN.

THIS Second Book of Samuel, it is perfectly clear, cannot have been written by him whose name is prefixed to it, because, in the twenty-fifth chapter of the previous book, we read of the death of Samuel. From this fact it is evident that the last seven chapters of the first book, and the whole of the second book, must have been written by another,—supposed to be Nathan, the prophet. Obviously they cannot have been written by him whose death is recorded before the conclusion of the one, and the commencement of the other.

The first chapter of this second book contains the story told by an Amalekite of the treatment he received, and the highly poetic and eloquent lamentation, or eulogy, pronounced by David over the death of Jonathan, whose friendship had never faltered in the worst of circumstances, nor wearied in the best; and even over Saul, whose persecution of himself he forgives and forgets, under his sense of deep sorrow at the sad and unexpected catastrophe which befell him.

It is easy to see that the story told by this fugitive

Amalekite was not true, because it contradicts in several respects the historic statement given on competent authority in the previous chapter. There we find that when the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him, that Saul asked his armour-bearer to destroy him. The armour-bearer refused. Saul, therefore, took a sword, and fell upon it—that is, committed suicide; and when his armour-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell upon his sword, and died with him. This is the strict and literal historic account. But in this chapter the Amalekite, who was evidently anxious to gain favour with David, about the time his accession to the throne was to take place, came to him, and endeavoured to propitiate his favour, and work himself into his good graces, by giving a minute, specific, and detailed account of all the incidents in the battle-field. When he arrived, David asked him, “From whence comest thou? And he said”—what he knew would excite the curiosity and the interest of David—“Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped.” David, as a patriot, as a man, as a Christian, asked, “How went the matter?” The Amalekite answered, “The people are fled from the battle, and many of the people also are fallen and dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also.” Then David asked how he knew these particulars. The young man then tells his story, thinking, as Saul stood in the way of David’s accession to the throne, that his dispatching Saul, and preventing the possibility of his recovery, would ingratiate himself with David, and as a very likely result, that he would be raised to political pre-eminence and power by the authority of the new king, for whose accession to the throne Saul’s removal now made way.

He says, "Saul was wounded,—his restoration I saw was impossible,"—of which, he was no competent judge, because he did not know whether it was a mortal wound or not, even according to his own showing,—“and when Saul saw me, he asked me to dispatch him, lest he should fall into the hands of the Philistines, who would expose him to the gaze of all, and bury him with a burial unworthy of the rank and dignity of a king. And he said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, I am an Amalekite. I slew him; and the evidence of it is the crown that was on his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, I have brought unto thee.” In the first place, this story does not hang together very well, for the Amalekite was as hateful to the Israelite as the Philistine. If Saul wished not to be slain by a Philistine, he would no less wish not to be slain by an Amalekite, and therefore that he called upon this Amalekite while his own armour-bearer stood by to put him out of pain, is extremely improbable; but when we compare this account with the record given by an impartial witness in the previous chapter, we are satisfied that this man was a craving, crouching, miserable place-hunter, and that he thought his pretensions would raise him to pre-eminence and power. He found what is always fact,—that truth, integrity, and honesty, are in the long run the surest passports to pre-eminence, and that falsehood, dishonesty, and crooked policy, generally carry in their bosoms their own speedy retribution. David, therefore, ordered this man to be destroyed, and accordingly he was destroyed, on the ground that he had lifted up his hand against the Lord's anointed. David's reverence for official position broke forth on

almost every occasion. He invariably showed that whilst he deplored the deeds of the man, he could not help revering the dignity and responsibilities of the sacred office he held.

He then utters a lamentation, or eulogy, over Saul and Jonathan. In the eighteenth verse, just before he begins, it is said, "He bade them teach the children of Judah the use of the bow." As far as we can ascertain the reason for this was, the Israelites were not armed generally with bows and arrows, but only with spears, but the Philistines were armed with bows and arrows; and the arrow, in ancient times, within a certain range, was a very formidable weapon. The elastic nature of the bow gave the arrow an impetus that made its blow fatal wherever it struck. But the Israelites, having no bows, were obliged of course to come near before they could use their weapons, and were probably mowed down by showers of arrows before they came within arm's length of the Philistines. So it was, as many of us have read in the ancient battles that raged between the English and the Scotch, on either side of the border that separates the two countries. It used to be said that one Englishman carried twelve Scotchmen at his belt—that is, every arrow of the twelve he was sure would destroy a Scotchman; the arrow being then the most formidable weapon, as it was in times long before.

What means, "It is written in the Book of Jasher?" Is there any book of the Bible so called? Jasher means in the Hebrew strictly, "the upright or the righteous one;" and it is a question among competent critics whether it should be translated "the Book of Jasher," the name of a person, or "The Book of the Righteous," which may be a general name for

any record in the Old Testament giving the deeds, the exploits, and the victories of the people of God. But suppose it should be a work bearing that specific name,—the mention of a book by an inspired penman does not make that book canonical. Paul, for instance, mentions two Greek poets, and gives an extract from the writings of each, but that does not prove that he regarded these poets as inspired men. So here the book of Jasher is referred to, not as an inspired book; if a book bearing the name of a person, it must have been a catalogue or record containing the names and commemorating the exploits of the illustrious men of the house of Israel.

The epitaph, eulogy, or funeral oration pronounced by David is full of poetic beauty:—"The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places"—that is, the field of battle; and then he bursts forth into the exclamation—the exclamation of unutterable grief and regret—"How are the mighty fallen!" and, as if he would keep the thing quiet, "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon, lest the Philistines should think that God has forsaken the people of Israel." Next, he apostrophizes in most eloquent terms the high places of the field, the mountains of Gilboa, and pronounces a curse upon them—"Let there be no dew nor rain upon you, because you have been the scene of so disastrous a slaughter, so terrible and destructive a reverse." Then he speaks of Saul and Jonathan as lovely and pleasant in their lives. How true is it that death seems to extinguish painful personal reminiscences!—when we accompany to the grave the dead dust of one with whom we may often have quarrelled *in life, or had difference of opinion, how disposed is*

memory, how willing is the heart, to throw into the shadow great defects, and to bring into brilliant and prominent relief all remembered excellences and long-hidden or denied beauties of character! It is well it should be so. David forgets all the bitterness of Saul, all the persecutions he encountered from him, and remembers and magnifies his excellence, and joins him with one who was his greatest and his warmest friend—speaks of them as not divided in death, as pleasant in their lives, as characterised by great speed, and strength, and prowess. Turning round to those who would weep most bitterly,—for it is woman's eyes that weep most tenderly and truly over the memory of the fallen brave,—he says, "Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel." And how touching is this—"I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me exceeded that love which is deepest and most enduring. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

Thus the grave receives all our quarrels and controversies to its keeping; and memory calls up, and imagination glorifies, and the heart tenderly feels, the beauty of those milder traits which were hid amid the foliage of life and circumstance; and the orator in his speech, and the poet in his strains, dwell on them with rapture and ecstasy.

THE ROAD TO A CROWN.

CHAPTER II.

DAVID SEEKS DIRECTION. PERFECTION. ABNER MAKES ISHBO-SHETH HIS TOOL. BATTLE. DUELS. WAR AND THE PEACE SOCIETY. ASAHEL'S DEATH.

THE first incident we find in this instructive history—a history that shows how David's time of suffering ended in his predicted time of victory, he having through much tribulation reached the kingdom—is his asking direction of God as to what course he should pursue now that Saul was numbered with the dead. Here is the very first and essential element of true religion: in perplexity let us ask counsel of God; but whilst leaning upon him to lead, let us use, in the exercise of common sense, all the providential elements that come within our power, and are legitimate, in order to be guided in the way that is right. God's word does not read, "My grace is a *substitute* for you;" but what is still better, "My grace is *sufficient* for you." One extreme makes God's grace, and help, and strength, a substitute for us, and we become indolent; another extreme idolizes self, and makes self all, and excludes all idea of God, and we become self-righteous, and fall. The Christian is to look up to God for direction as if all depended upon Him, and yet to put forth his common sense, his energies, his

efforts, as if all rested upon the faithful and sacred use of these. David here asks, first of all, directions of God, "Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron. So David went up thither."

Next, we have a most interesting trait in the character of David, which shows, that underlying great error and grievous sin there was a spring of rich and inexhaustible grace. You must not expect to find in any Christian, delineated in the word of God, absolute perfection; you do not find it in actual experience, nor do you find it in history; you may discover a perfect man in a romance or a novel, but novels and romances are distorted caricatures, not photographic portraits, of life; the Bible is the faithful mirror which alone reflects the moral face of mankind, revealing man as he was in Eden, man as he is now, but, blessed be God! predicting also what by grace he ultimately shall be. We have detected in David's character grievous defects, but we have also discovered some traits of genuine excellence; here is one unquestionably most beautiful: he calls those that reverently buried the deceased royal suicide, and says to them, "Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have showed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him." In all David's intercourse with Saul, though he was maltreated, persecuted, reproached, and his very life often imperilled by him, he never said an angry word, nor vented a bitter reproach. On every occasion he shows his deference to his office as the sovereign of the realm, and his gratitude to those that displayed in their dealings the least act of kindness to *the deceased monarch*. Before us is a trait extremely

beautiful,—he forgives his enemies, and sets a precedent that all would do well to imitate, and that every true Christian will more or less imitate.

We find that David, though anointed and destined to the throne, was not to reach it without encountering great trouble, many trials, and much opposition. A very ambitious, insolent, and vain-glorious fellow of the name of Abner, the son of Ner, who was captain of Saul's host, took Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, as a convenient tool. Ishbosheth was not the legitimate heir of Saul. If the throne was to be occupied by succession he ought to have taken a son of Jonathan, but he did not do so, he was too far-seeing and cunning. Jonathan's son, the legitimate heir, was young; he was also, as we read elsewhere, lame; he would not have been in any respect a suitable tool for Abner to work with. But this Ishbosheth seems to have been, as his name implies, an unprincipled fellow, ready for everything that would serve his turn,—one of those worthless things that lie about scattered in all conditions of the world and in all nations, whom ambitious men lay hold of, and turn to their own unholy purposes. Abner got hold of this young man, and made him the stalking-horse on which he hoped to ride to a throne, displace David, and crown himself as the monarch of Judah and Israel. Abner made Ishbosheth king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and left to David that tribe out of whom the Messiah was to come, the choicest and still the representative tribe of Israel. He then went out in battle to oppose David. David's sister's son, a young man of the name of Joab, was constituted the

general of David's forces. Abner and Joab, the one representing David, and the other representing ambition, pride, and wickedness, met as two conflicting hosts on the opposite sides of a stream. Then the proposal was made by Abner to decide the matter, not by a duel, for that means two, but by twelve on one side and twelve on the other. They agreed, and the slaughter on both sides was almost total. But was this right? It was extremely wrong; and it had all the iniquity and more than the cruelty of what one can scarcely call the modern duel, for common sense and decency—and, I believe, now the law of the Horse Guards—have banished that most unjustifiable, contemptible, and silly of all things, the practice of duelling. Any man who would go out to fight a duel, if his mind be enlightened, goes out either to commit suicide or murder; and if he be saved committing either, it is his cowardice or God's good providence that takes better care of him than he takes of himself. The very idea of supposing for one moment that twelve combatants on each side decide by their swords the justice of a cause is absurd. There is a wrong idea held by the members of the Peace Society respecting war. They think it is two armies fighting together, and determining by a battle which side is right. It is no such thing. The only way in which you can justify war is this,—a certain power violates the conventional law of nations, enters into a province where it has no business: you say to that power, in diplomatic correspondence, "You have done wrong; you ought not to do this; and you must retire and keep within your own bounds." He answers, "I will not do so," and insists upon occupying territory that he ought not, and the occupation of

which would disturb the comfort of the national neighbourhood; just as one man's house set on fire endangers another, or one house falling risks the falling of a whole row of houses. You say, "You must retire;" he says, "I wont;" then what is the duty of a nation? To put him out by force. If a thief break into your house, you send for the police, and they soon dislodge him; and if one of the police officers is hurt in doing so, you do not say it was an atrocious thing to try to dislodge the intruder,—the fault was in the robber, not in the policemen who, at much inconvenience, put him out. So if we are called upon to put out an enemy, or a disturber of Europe's quiet and peace, we do not risk the contingencies of right and wrong upon the issues of a fight; we use—and here is the only justifiable ground—the force that lies within our reach to carry out the laws of justice and of righteousness and truth, and to secure at home that quiet which the intruder wishes to disturb. All duels or conflicts between dozens, or fives, or twos, risking the issue upon the incidental result, is altogether unjustifiable and absurd. It is as if when a robber breaks into your house, and you send for a police officer, you were to say to the robber, "Well, now, we will settle the matter thus: you go out into the garden with a pistol, and the policeman shall go out with another, and then if you kill the policeman you are entitled to have my house; if he kill you, then I have a right to retain my house." Anything more absurd cannot possibly be conceived. The duty of the police officer is to turn out the robber; the duty of the nation, and of the soldier, is to repel the aggressor at any *risk*.

After this conflict had been decided, there was no cessation of the war, for the two armies met, and a fierce conflict took place; and after the battle Abner, the ambitious and aspiring officer, ran away. But it appears that Asahel, who was one of three brothers, and as swift as a roe, pursued Abner. He calculated on his speed alone, and forgot the element of strength, and learnt by the issue that the race is not always to the swift. His speed of foot was his misfortune. He was slain by Abner, whose warnings he would not listen to; and so became a useful memorial to others not to pursue the enemy too far, lest they should pursue beyond the reach and the line of safety and of prudence.

Abner called to Joab, "Shall the sword devour for ever? It is time to put an end to this; let us have a conference, let us settle this matter about which we differ. Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? how long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?" This was very clever on the part of Abner; he began to feel exhausted by the conflict, and to see that he was sure to get the worst of it, and though he was consciously in the wrong, yet with exquisite cunning he conceals all. He should not have begun the war, and then there would not have been the necessity for this conference. Joab, however, who was anxious to have peace, entered into conference with him, and there was established peace, not without severe punishment to Abner and those that followed him,—a peace that lasted till the house of David grew stronger, and ultimately obtained possession of the throne.

ABNER'S DEATH.

CHAPTER III.

POLYGAMY. ABNER'S DEATH. HIS POLICY. DAVID'S LEAGUE WITH ABNER. ABNER'S JESUISTRY. RIGHT ONLY IS MIGHT. JOAB'S TREACHERY.

It is necessary, in order to understand the relative connection of this chapter, that we remember that in the previous chapter Abner proclaimed Ishbosheth, a pliant tool purposely selected by himself, and not the proper lawful successor to the throne, to be king of Israel. We must recollect also that a skirmish took place between twelve of Abner's men, opposed to David, and twelve of Joab's men, Joab being the general of David. On that occasion Asahel was slain, the brother of him that slew Abner, as intimated in the course of this chapter. The whole of this story is most remarkable, as of a picture of the sun struggling with clouds, obstructions, and difficulties, until he ascends his meridian throne, and sheds down splendour upon the whole house of Israel. It teaches us many lessons: one lesson is very plain,—the disastrous results of what God suffered, not sanctioned; suffered for the hardness of their hearts—polygamy. Wherever we trace the effects of that vile system, we find them invariably disastrous. Instead of having here or elsewhere a precedent for it applicable now, we find it merely suffered by God, but exhibited in his *providence as condemned by practical and bitter fruits.*

Abner meets his just reward. A more unprincipled politician, a more subtle and cunning candidate for such favours as were to be had—one with a conscience more elastic, or more accommodating to all demands likely to redound to his advantage—we do not read of in any part of the whole Word of God. We are told in the previous chapter that he rose against David, who occupied the sovereignty of the tribe of Judah—Abner standing by the other tribes, and so making a division in the kingdom. But in this chapter we read that Abner grew displeased with Ishbosheth, the citizen king he had set up,—and citizen kings have felt in all ages the hand that sets them up most enthusiastically, is generally the first to pull them down when it suits them. He had set up Ishbosheth to answer his own purpose, in opposition to the legitimate sovereign, David; and now, when he and Ishbosheth have a quarrel, he leaves Ishbosheth, turns round to David, and says to him, “I am tired of the side on which I have been fighting, and as I am a person who has his price, I will promise to come over to you, and be upon your side, and vindicate your claim to the kingdom of Judah and of all Israel. One only wonders that David did not turn out such a consummate villain from his presence, and order him to leave his kingdom and his capital at twelve hours’ notice. But David had grievous imperfections—many weaknesses, and instead of doing so, he said “Well, I will make a league with thee.” Now, he ought not to have said this: but we must not forget that facts recorded here are not sanctions for certain courses of conduct, but truthful records, very necessary in order *that the Bible may give what it does give,—not a*

profile, nor a highly-coloured view, but a faithful, full-faced portrait of human nature, just as sin has made it in some, and as grace has sanctified and consecrated it in others. "But," David said, "one thing I require of thee, that is, thou shalt not see my face, except thou first bring Michal, Saul's daughter," to whom he was married, but who had been taken away from him. "And David sent messengers to Ishbosheth, saying, Deliver me my wife, Michal," and Ishbosheth did so. And her husband—that is, her second husband—went with her along weeping. One would have thought, judging of the whole story, that he would have been most thankful to get rid of her; but, instead of that, it is said that he went along weeping behind her, and very sorry that she was going back to David, to whom she seemed most anxious to return. "Then Abner had communication with the elders of Israel, saying, Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you." Here notice how this cunning politician goes forth to carry out the league that he had made with David. In the previous chapter he exasperated them against David, in this chapter he goes to them and says, "The Lord hath spoken of David, saying, By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies. And Abner also spake in the ears of Benjamin; and Abner went also to speak in the ears of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel, and that seemed good to the whole house of Benjamin." Then Abner came to David, and twenty men with him, and David was so charmed with his kingdom, now completely restored to him, that he made a feast to Abner and the men that were with

him. "And Abner said unto David, I will arise and go, and will gather all Israel unto my lord the king, that they may make a league with thee, and that thou mayest reign over all that thine heart desireth. And David sent Abner away, and he went in peace;" that is to say, enjoying the sunshine of the countenance of the monarch.

Wickedness may prosper for a while, but not always. We may depend upon it that truth and justice are the straight lines that lead most speedily and most directly to good and great results; and that a crooked policy, however plausible, God will not bless, and circumstances will not prosper. We read in the sequel, then, that Joab, when he heard that Abner had gone in peace, "came to the king, and said, What hast thou done? behold, Abner came unto thee; why is it that thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone? Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest." "And when Joab was come out, he sent messengers after Abner," which he had no right to do, and brought him back. When Abner returned, Joab, who had called him back professedly to consult with him about the kingdom, seized the opportunity of stabbing him in private. The reason that Joab and his brother Abishai gave for this cruel and cowardly act was that Abner had slain their brother Asahel. Joab slew him not to avenge his brother's death, but to open a pathway to his own promotion. God shows by facts faithfully recorded in the sacred page, that the sentiment of the prophet is not an exaggerated one,—that the heart of man is by nature deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.

SIN AND RETRIBUTION.

CHAPTER IV.

ISHBOSHETH'S PERPLEXITY. HIS DEATH BY CONSPIRATORS. THEIR APPROACH TO DAVID. DAVID'S DENUNCIATION AND PUNISHMENT OF THE MURDERERS. THE DEATH PENALTY.

WE read in the commencement of this chapter that when Ishbosheth, Saul's son, heard that Abner was dead, his hands were feeble; that is, he did not know what to do, or what course to adopt; he had not wisdom enough to decide for himself—a fact which shows that genius is not by inheritance, and that in no circumstances is there a monopoly of mind, or wisdom, or talent. It is well that such is the case. Rechab and Baanah, two brothers, resolved to slay Ishbosheth, and bring his head to Hebron. They thought that, by slaying Ishbosheth, whom, probably against his own wish, Abner had made a rival to David, they would do David very great service, and would thus put an end to rebellion, or trample out the last smouldering sparks of insurrection that still existed in the kingdom of Israel. One cannot but be struck, in reading these instances, with the belief that many of them were conceived and executed on the supposition that there was no God. Nothing seemed more natural, more likely to be *successful*, than some of these wicked schemes, if

one might only exclude the reign of God; but he reigns, and none should forget that in all arrangements, schemes, and designs, there is and can be no success if there be no principle, or, at least, the incidental success that does occur is usually the prelude to greater disaster; whereas the path of principle, of integrity, of truthfulness, of right, may be slow, seemingly zigzag, occasionally it may meet with reverses, but in the long run it will be discovered that the path of principle is the path of the highest expediency, and that no man commits a grosser inexpediency than he that violates an everlasting principle of righteousness and truth. They thought now that by slaying this poor, silly Ishbosheth, they would put an end to the last rival of David, and the only living candidate for his throne. Accordingly they came, and found him lying unsuspecting on a bed at noon. This indicated his want of sagacity. He might have known that, now that Abner was gone, there were many enemies about him, and that he ought to take care of himself, and use such precautions as were within reach to preserve his life. But his wits were not great at any time—they seem to have grown less by trouble; and, unconsciously, he exposed himself to the first assault that any one of his enemies might choose to make upon him. As was to be feared, these two came, “and smote him, and slew him, and beheaded him, and took his head, and gat them away through the plain all night. And they brought the head of Ishbosheth unto David to Hebron, and said to the king, Behold, the head of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul thine enemy, which sought thy life.” They came to David with great expectations of reward, their hearts bounding with delight at their success, carrying the

head of the murdered man, and supposing that David would feel too glad to have got rid of a troublesome enemy to be particularly careful about the mode in which he was got rid of. With raised expectations they said, "The Lord hath avenged my lord the king." Rarely does a villain do a wicked thing without some sanctimonious covert for the deed. It is said in Italy that the bandits, when they go out upon their predatory excursions, are sure to supplicate the blessing of the Virgin, and when they succeed, it is said they return the Virgin Mary thanks for enabling them to plunder some unhappy traveller. But how often do we find in our own country that men who are deliberately concocting a swindle, men who are deliberately planning to plunder and rob the poor, will begin—oh horrible hypocrisy!—the atrocious scheme with prayer, and profess to seek God's blessing upon a plan for ruining many a poor tradesman, and breaking many poor widows' and orphans' hearts. Let us show our religion not by pretence and loud profession, but by the fruits of its living, transforming, and sanctifying influence, so that it shall prevent us ever doing a mean thing, and forbid us, as it does, ever to do a dishonest and a criminal thing. When they came to David, thus full of hope, they discovered to their dismay that they did not know David truly. He had fallen into great faults, he had committed scandalous sins, and they thought that these were not the incidental faults of a true Christian, but the natural and spontaneous product of an unsanctified heart, ready to reciprocate their doings. But who fearfully amazed must they have been when David told them in plain terms they had been guilty of murder. "As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed

my soul out of all adversity, when one told me, saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold of him, and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings; how much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house, upon his bed? shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth?" And David, acting judicially as a king, not personally and out of personal revenge, ordered these two to be slain as murderers. Now, here again we have at least the precedent, if we have not the law, that a murderer should be put to death. I think it is a false and a sickly sympathy with crime that leads men to conclude that a murderer should not be put to death. The law of God is plain; not a Mosaic nor a Levitical law, but a law enacted before Moses or Levi were born, or their economies instituted, that "Whosoever sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." And we may depend upon it, that the highest righteousness or conformity to God's law is the greatest mercy in the long run to our country and our kind.

INFLUENCE OF PROSPERITY.

CHAPTER V.

INFLUENCE OF WEALTH. SYMPATHY. TUTELARY GODS. DAVID'S SUCCESS. STORMS AND CLOUDS. HIRAM IN THE WAY OF BUSINESS. DAVID'S DECLENSIONS.

AFTER the compact which David entered into with the remaining tribes of Israel, who at first refused to obey him, all these tribes came to David at Hebron, and said, "Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh." We naturally ask, How it happened that they did not discover this intimate relationship before? What obscured or hid it? The reason, alas, is a very natural, very common, and a very obvious one. How often do we find it occur in this world, that if a relative near and dear becomes depressed, and is overtaken by what is thought sometimes, I fear, a discredit—poverty, he is then recognised as one of our most distant cousins—a great many degrees off. But if the same relative should rise to dignity, and rank, and riches, and power, then, we hasten to inform him, "Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh." We are so prone to claim kinship or kindredship with a relative in prosperity; we are so blind as not to see the relationship when poverty stands between our eyes and it. These tribes, finding out that David's was not the setting,

but the rising sun, flocked around him, and discovered what they had been so many years in discovering in other circumstances—that they were his very bone and his very flesh. They also found out that instead of David being a very small king of a very small minority, and a very useless man, and not fit to be their sovereign, it was he that led them out in Israel, it was he that fed God's people Israel, and now he shall be a captain over all Israel. How strange is human nature! Yet this is bad human nature, for a magnanimous heart, if not a sanctified one, will recognise ties and bonds wherever they exist, irrespective of outward circumstances; and just as God in nature covers up nature's bleakest places with the most fragrant flowers, so should a true and a noble heart see in those near and dear, however poor, objects that claim his largest sympathies, the expression of his greatest beneficence. Poverty may be as honourable as rank and title; nothing is disgraceful but sin and wickedness.

When the elders of Israel came and made a league with David, they anointed him king over all Israel; and he was thirty years old when he began to reign. And then, by an anticipatory remark, it is said, "he reigned forty years."

It is said that David and his men went to the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, and to the site of Jerusalem, which was to be made the future capital of Palestine. They said to David, those at least that defied him, "Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither." The blind and the lame were regarded as tutelary deities; for it is a singular fact that these heathen Canaanite nations *had actually* made one idol to commemorate Jacob, who

was lame, and his image was constituted one of the tutelary gods of the country. In the image of another patriarch they had a representation of the blind. These blind and lame were not the poor, but the tutelary deities of the place, in whom these debased idolaters put their trust and confidence. They said, our fort is perfectly impregnable as long as these tutelary gods occupy niches within it. Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, and David destroyed the lame and the blind, that is, the idols, whom his soul hated; for the people went up to the gutter, or some of the holes through which the archers shot, got access to it, took possession of it, and destroyed all that resisted and opposed. The consequence was that David went on, and grew great, though, alas, he did not progressively grow good; for David, with all his excellences, had great defects; and never was he so little like God in his life as when he grew great and prosperous in this world. How often have we felt that when the sun shines, and there is no cloud, and all is bright behind, and all is fair, bright, and brilliant before, we then forget God; but only when some heavy cloud settles over us, only when the hope and the joy of our eyes is taken away, do we begin to feel that this world is not our home, that this is not our rest, and that in another and a better, far beyond, must there be, if there be any at all, a rest for the people of God. Give me neither poverty nor riches; make me neither prosperous nor poor, but feed me with food convenient for me.

Then Hiram, King of Tyre, sent messengers to David, with cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons, that *they might* build David an house. This Hiram

was the progenitor, if not the grandfather, of another Hiram, whose history will come up before us. I think this Hiram was a thorough man of business. He was a heathen; it was no admiration of David's God, no sympathy with David's creed, that inspired him; but as a tradesman, seeing a party take possession of a house likely to want many things that he can supply, will send his card or information that he has such things, so this very clever heathen man of business, this royal trader, the King of Tyre, having large forests, with plenty of cedar trees, and having plenty of carpenters and masons wanting employment, sent a specimen of his craft and a proof of his skill, in order that David might give him further and larger orders, and that he might get the benefit of them. David accepted his overtures; and he also at last perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake.

Alas, at this very point where David became so prosperous, and where a grateful heart and an obedient life ought to have been his ceaseless aim and characteristic, we begin, reluctantly, to peruse the record of his sad declensions, his grievous sins; sins that teach us in the sequel, first, how frail is the strongest; secondly, how much alloy is in the purest gold; and, above all, how much need there is for him that thinketh he standeth to take heed lest he fall. We also learn here as in other cases, what a contrast is the purest specimen of human nature in the Bible to Christ, the spotless and the holy one. We learn how true, demonstrably true, the Bible is in this light *alone*; even out of the sins it records, we extract con-

firmatory evidence of its origin. Faithful and impartial pens belong to its writers. Take any novelist who sketches a character, or a poet with eye in fine frenzy rolling, and you will soon see that they present you with a character either of unmitigated wickedness, or unparalleled and unprecedented excellence, in fact, an unreal portrait. But you will find in the Bible not a profile view of human nature—half a face is often a caricature, as half a truth is often a monstrous lie; but the full portrait of human nature just as it is by sin, or as it is made by grace; and, blessed be God, you have the portrait of it also as it will be when grace shall be lost in glory, and all alloy shall be detached, and the pure gold, reflecting the image of Him that purified it, shall alone remain. The very faithfulness and fulness with which the sacred penmen reflect the characters they were inspired to sketch, in spite of those national and other prejudices and passions which prompted them to soften down the evil, and throw up with exaggerated intensity the good, are proofs that they wrote as inspired by the Holy Ghost.

THE ROYAL ENQUIRER.

CHAPTER V.

“And David enquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? . . . And David did so, as the Lord had commanded him; and smote the Philistines.”—2 SAM. v. 19, 25.

THESE words seem strange and almost unprofitable; yet, on further reflection, we may discover that, like all the texts in God's word, they are full of practical and precious meaning, and unfold to our study two great duties, of which David, in this instance, was an illustrious precedent, each of instant and universal obligation. In the one instance, where David enquires of the Lord, we have David the *petitioner*; in the other, where David does as God commanded him, we have David the *practitioner*: in other words, two aspects of the character of this illustrious man,—David praying, and David practising; David consulting God for direction, for instruction, for correction; and David, under the inspiration of the grace that he receives at the fountain in answer to prayer, going forth into the wide world, and in the high public roads of life, and in the majority—would we could say in all of the by-paths of private life—practising as God enabled him.

First of all, then, let us study one aspect of David, presented in the nineteenth verse; namely, David the petitioner, or David in prayer. "David enquired of the Lord." And who was he at this time? The monarch of a loyal and a magnificent realm; one of the most magnificent on which the sun ever rose. But David felt that even on a throne he had not in his heart a capital of happiness that would stand him always in stead. We often say we are unhappy because of circumstances—this is often a great delusion. There are happier hearts beating in a cottage with a quarter of an acre of garden attached to it, than in a palace with a vast and magnificent realm to rule and reign over. It is not the circumstances that make the heart happy, but it is the heart that has gained its true polarity, and found its peace in God, that spreads over all the circumstances a transforming and a glorifying lustre. We have here one great fact,—that David on a throne was not satisfied without something higher and greater than himself. In other words, there is no elevation in social life beyond the necessity of prayer, because no human heart can be lifted above the region of sorrow and of sin. You will meet with men who deny the existence of sin, most foolishly, most stupidly; but did any of us ever meet with a man who denied the existence of sorrow? Never. And yet what is sorrow? The track that sin leaves—the echo of judgment—the shadow of a great primal sin. As no man, therefore, can be lifted above the condition of a creature, with wants to be supplied, or a sinner, with sins to be forgiven, so no man can be lifted in providence beyond the necessity of prayer. A day will come when we shall need no prayer; for there are no prayers in

heaven : there is only praise, because there are no wants, the stimulants of prayer, but ceaseless fullness, the ground of praise. But as in this world no man can soar above the law of gravitation, so no man can rise above the region of wants to be filled, of sins to be forgiven, of tears to be wiped away. And, alas, it is often found that the higher we rise in the moral, as in the physical world, and the loftier the pinnacle of greatness we attain, the more rarefied and the more difficult to breathe is the air, so that no man stands so insecurely and uncomfortably as he who stands upon the highest pinnacle of this world's greatness. It is a great mistake, a grievous misapprehension, to suppose that splendid equipage means a happy possessor ; it is a sad mistake to imagine that the higher we rise in social life, the happier we become. There are thorns in royal crowns—the brow aches that wears the brightest diadem. There is no family, from the highest to the lowest, that hath not one vacant chair, and some families have two, three, four, five ; and perhaps they never began to feel happy till the gap that death had created made them seek happiness where happiness is only to be found,—in the home of our Father, and in the possession of a Saviour as theirs. David not only is an illustration of this, but in his practice he rose above all that he had and possessed, and enquired for what he wanted of God. This is the more remarkable because it is a contrast to the facts of history. For what has been the almost universal fact ? That the moment man finds he has no rival, he begins to think himself a god. Truly and well does history speak with its thousand chapters, and Scripture with its one,

but that one so emphatic,—that whoever he be, priest or prince, who takes to himself a ray from the glory of God, takes also a curse into his own bosom. We have all read of the monarch who said one day, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built by the might of mine arm?” and next day he was eating grass like an ox, and herding with the beasts of the field. We have all read of the great Napoleon, who said in his arrogance,—shall we say rather in his forgetfulness of himself and of God,—“I propose, and I dispose;” and this proposer and disposer, this absolute claimant of what was God’s prerogative alone, lived to gnaw the chains of a captive in a desert isle of the ocean—the prisoner of the very nation that he spurned, and on whose liberties he sought to put his imperial heel, and whose very existence he would have wiped away, if he could, from the map of the nations of Europe. Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall; and let us learn from the necessity that David felt, and also from the facts of history, that it is not in man, nor in monarch, that lives to order his way aright.

David, by thus enquiring of God in his palace and beside his throne, recognised in God what I think is a most precious practical truth,—not a distant sovereign, insensible to the sorrows, or the griefs, or the afflictions of his creatures, clothed in royal reserve, never to be approached, and rarely even to be felt; but God, from whom he sought direction and guidance—acting, arranging, ordering, restraining, and sweetening, or sanctifying, as he saw to be most expedient. This is a very important truth. We are all apt to think that God has given the world a start, and then left it to make

the best of its way home ; or that he has wound up this world as a watch, and left it to run itself out in the course of about seven thousand years. But such is not the case. God gives an impulse fresh every moment to every rotation of this orb upon its axis ; God every spring brings out of the chaos of winter a new and more beautiful creation. Philosophy may give a very scientific solution by looking at second causes ; but depend upon it, the least Christian's apprehension is, here, the noblest and the truest,—that God scatters every morning the dewdrops like diamonds from his fatherly hand, and tints every opening flower with his own perfect touch ; that God's breath gives to every rose in June its perfume ; that He lights up the lamps of the sky every night ; and gives us every day the virgin beauty of the morning, the majestic and royal magnificence of noon, and the matron loveliness and repose of the evening twilight. These things the philosopher will tell you are all explicable by looking at second causes ; these things the Christian tells you are the everyday and ceaseless doings of God. There is not a babe at whose birth God presides not, and not a babe dies for whose death there was not a reason—a great reason, a beneficent reason. God was thereat, and thereby taking care of all. It is literally true, it is no figure of speech,—not a hair can fall from your head which God does not superintend ; not a bird, wing-wearied, can drop to the earth, that God is not with. He is amid the atoms as much as he is amid the angels ; there is nothing so minute that he does not inspect, and there is nothing so magnificent that he does not every day and every moment control. If you could prove to me that God is not in little things, I will prove

to you, with irresistible logic, that God is not in great things. Take your own biography,—it may be upon the lowest or it may be upon the highest level: give me now the range of your whole life, be it fifty, or forty, or thirty years; give me power to put in a pin, just where I like, in your past biography, and the whole of your course will be entirely altered,—so truly do we depend upon little things. It was the turning of a corner that made you the husband of that wife,—the wife of that husband. It was an accidental conversation in an omnibus, or in a railway-carriage, or in a steamboat, that brought you where you heard that Gospel which has touched your heart, and has made you an heir of the kingdom of heaven. Will any man tell me that these were the accidents of chance? If chance could do these things, chance could make a world; and if chance can make a world, chance can govern it too. But we have learned our creed better: I believe not in chance, but I believe in God the Father, the maker of heaven and of earth; and I am taught to pray not to chance, but to enquire, and say, as David substantially said, “Our Father which art in heaven.” Now, if God be thus conversant with all, and ruling and regulating all, it is necessary, of course, that he must see all, in order that he may sympathise and succour where needed. He must also have power to control all. If God did not see all, of course he would not know where was suffering; if he did not hear all, the orphan’s prayer would never reach him; and if he could see and hear all, but had no outstretched omnipotent hand to help all, then all would go to ruin or be in vain. But here is the blessed thought,—that the poorest widow under David’s sway *was as much noticed*, and as much taken care of,—though

the history is not so recorded,—as was David, the royal monarch of that noble realm. The mistake we fall into is, that God takes care of great things, and that it is worthy of him to take care of great things. But recent scientific disclosures have shown us the most exquisite organisms in a drop of water—organisms so beautifully formed that it is impossible to escape the conviction that God is as much in a drop of water, as he is in the ocean that encircles our earth like a bright zone; and that he is taking care of one of these most tiny organisms as truly and beneficially, as he is taking care of the cherubim that are in the sky.

We learn from David's thus enquiring of God, that we may ask God not only about present things, but about future things also. This seems to some, I dare say, a new view of prayer; and yet, if you look at David's enquiry, you will see that he enquired of the Lord if he should do a thing that was in some degree future. Where do most of our anxieties come from? From the future. It may be that we should not drag from the future, on the shores of the present, so many anxieties as we do; but still it is fact that we are anxious about to-morrow. There are, also, some things in every to-morrow about which we may and ought to concern ourselves, as rational and reflecting beings. But we are often unprofitably perplexed. How delightful, then, that I can ask God not only for strength for the present, but for direction about to-morrow. He is able to help me. The past, the present, and the future, are with God equally luminous; in fact, there is with God no future, no past, but all past, present, future, is one outspread page, legible to the eye of an ever-present and an omniscient God.

What a blessed privilege is this, that one may ask God about the future !

Let me notice, in the next place, in the history of David as the petitioner, that he prayed to God alone. How does it happen that about the very time that David was thus worshipping the one living and true God, Greece and Rome were worshipping the idols that their own hands had formed? What a contrast between Palestine in the age of David, and Greece in the age of Pericles! Why was Greece, illustrious for its exquisite statuary, for its unrivalled architecture, for its magnificent poetry, for its paintings so like nature that the very birds of heaven used to peck at the fruit that the great Apelles entrusted to the canvas; why was Greece, thus celebrated, bowing down to Jupiter, and Mars, and Minerva, and gods that had no existence, or gods that Pandemonium was ransacked for, that they might be seated upon thrones in Paradise? David, and David's people, who knew nothing of statuary, nothing of painting, and little of architecture, for the only temple they built was after a copy that was given from heaven—who knew nothing of all that Greece was illustrious for—who had no æsthetic attainments, yet had a theology that was pure and perfect. In a country where all was unrivalled intellectual greatness, Socrates offered a cock in sacrifice to a heathen god with his last breath, and Plato, the magnificent, could not see beyond the gods that were of man's making. God inspired the theology of Israel; man was the author of the theology of Plato, and Socrates, and the Stoa, and the Academus. David did not ask any Christian man or woman in heaven to help him. David knew that

Abraham was in glory; he knew that Isaac and Jacob, and the world's grey fathers, were in perfect happiness, and that Adam and Eve were in heaven; but he did not ask the intercession of Adam, nor did he pray to Eve, nor did he cry to Abraham, "Do thou help us." And if David in the grey twilight of Christianity prayed to God only and exclusively, shall we, as we approach its culminating noon, ask the intercession of saints of any degree or of any sort? No, eternally no! our cry must go up by Christ, the living way, that connects the deepest grave with the highest throne in heaven; and were thousands of saints to interpose midway, and offer to take care of our prayer—were the Virgin Mary herself to come down radiant with glory, and say that she would take care that every petition should be duly presented, and a proper answer should be sent,—I would tell her firmly, but respectfully, Retire into your own place as the worshipper; what have I to do with thee? I am Christ's; and He is mine: I can pray to God only, through Christ only, as the living way; and not the highest saint in heaven may come between me and my Father in asking mercy and pardon, or enquiring after what I need to know. There cannot be a greater mistake than to suppose the necessity of it. Can any one come closer to me than my Blessed Lord, who was bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, and knows me infinitely better, as he is to me infinitely closer, than myself or any of mankind? And can any one be nearer God than he who is God? The whole chasm between a holy God and an unholy race is spanned and crossed by Christ; and I need no one else to eke out his perfect mediation. Would a tear-drop add to the depths

of the ocean? Would my breath increase the impetus or the volume of the tempestuous hurricane? Could the finite add to the infinite? No; place beside me the holiest of heaven's tenantry, and offer me their best services, I must say, as Abraham said to his servants when he went up to offer Isaac, You, the holiest of you all, remain at the bottom of the mount, while I go up alone, and in the name of Christ alone seek blessings from my Father alone, absolutely sure of an abundant and an instant answer.

David's was no new, and, blessed be God, it is no obsolete practice. David as a petitioner is neither a new precedent, nor an obsolete one. It is a bright thought, that on each Sabbath day concentric zones of worshippers are surrounding this globe of ours, and offering up their prayers and their praises in one great hurricane of adoration to the one living and true God in the name of the one Saviour. And what a blessed privilege that we are permitted to do so! Do we not often ask questions that no science can explain, that no philosophy can solve, that no father, or rabbi, or doctor, can give any answer to? Is it not, therefore, a happy and a glorious privilege that we can enquire of God even when we have no access to man, and that God will answer what man can give no satisfactory reply to? And what a blessed thought that a Christian's prayer can penetrate the clouds, wrestle with the tempest and overcome it, pass by annihilating all space, and enter instantly into the ear of God.

Having seen David the petitioner as a precedent for us, let me turn now to the second aspect, or the other profile of David—namely, David as the practitioner. In *this case* David is a beautiful precedent for us;

after asking what was his duty, he did as God instructed him, and obeyed what God commanded. His heart was made willing at a throne of grace, his hand was made strong and ready by that grace inspiring him. Prayer not followed by practice is simply hypocrisy, and practice not preceded by prayer is simply atheism. The petitioner and the practitioner, the cry for grace and the use of that grace in practical life, must be combined in order to constitute the true Christian. What is good conduct? what are, to use a more popular phrase, good works? The answer is given here; nothing is good work unless it be obedience to a divine command. If a soldier were told, for instance, to stand sentry at a given spot, and not to move from that spot, but were he to see a chance of shooting at a hostile force, and were to leave his post, and take his place behind some rock, and take aim, it would be a good act unquestionably, so far as destroying the enemy, inasmuch as it is his duty, but it would be a bad act, inasmuch as he had disobeyed the command of his commanding officer. All great heroes must be obedient to specific commands. Obedience, therefore, implies command; and however good the thing may be that you do in itself, yet if it be a thing not commanded, God says, "Who has required this at your hand?" In order to make the obedience good, in order to make works good, there must be, in the first place, a good and a proper motive. Now, what is the motive that must animate every work that man does? The answer is given us in the Bible, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God;" that is the fulfilling of the whole law. In other words, no obedience is good and acceptable to God unless it be inspired by love. Let us

prove this : take the most distinguished philanthropist that lives ; select from the ranks of society some man who builds asylums, subscribes to charities, and ministers to the necessities of the widow and the orphan ; he is neither a believer in God nor inspired in any sense by love to God. What do you say of that man ? Not that his conduct is not beautiful before man ; it is eminently so, it is worthy of imitation ; but before God it is utterly unacceptable, because not inspired, nor assuming to be inspired, by the motive that God demands. I am not discussing the reasonableness of this ; I do not pronounce or condemn ; I am merely stating that however valuable, or excellent, these things may be,—and such are so before man,—they are not acceptable in a higher region, because they are not inspired by what God requires in His holy word. I repeat I do not disparage such things, I admire them ; all I say is, they want that divine something which gives them vitality, and is essential in order to establish their relation to God, that is, love to God. In order, also, that obedience to God may be what it should be, the end of all must be the glory of God ; and the name in which all is done must be Christ's name ; and unless the obedience be of this kind, it can never be acceptable before God. We must ask for the noblest deed we ever did pardon through the blood of Christ, because we shall find that the most splendid virtues, in the language of a Father of the fourth century, are in God's sight but splendid sins ; that is, by a strong phrase he conveys that there is so much alloy, so much defect, in the motive, in the end, in the object, so much self-conceit, and self-seeking, *that we need to bring our highest virtues and our*

greatest sins to the footstool of the heavenly grace, and pray to God that he would be pleased through Christ's blood to forgive them all. In order to do what God accepts, we must be what God alone can make us—believers, that is, Christians. When a Christian does a good act, what is it? A priestly offering, on Christ the only altar, presented by Christ the only Mediator, in the golden censer of his perfect intercession, and acceptable to God through Christ, and through him alone.

It is obligatory on Christians to excel the world, and not merely to equal it. It is a sad fact that there are done by men of the world things more splendid, liberal, and noble before men, than are done by Christians. We ought to do deeds as noble outwardly and from inward motives which are peculiar to Christians intrinsically better. We ought to do greater things because we have nobler inspiration and ends. But if you say we have not the means to do this, I answer, to do good does not mean to give £1000 to this charity, and £1000 to that; otherwise only the rich could do good. Could our eyes see deeper and farther we should find in obscure and lowly dwellings helps rendered, sympathies interchanged, sacrifices submitted to, most beautiful in the sight of God, and which would be so in yours also, if we could only see the motives. Such deeds excel in their weight, magnificence, and greatness, the noblest contributions that the rich ever put into the treasury? It is the motive, the end, and character, that God owns and that God accepts. Good works are not the ground of your acceptance before God, but they are the fruits. Your obedience does not make you justified, but it shows to the world

what grace you receive as the petitioner, and what grace can make you as the practitioner. Good works are a Christian's jewels ; obedience is the very jewellery of heaven. No diamond, no ruby, no amethyst, no emerald, not one of the twelve stones on which the new Jerusalem is built, is so resplendent, so beautiful in the sight of God as the ornament of a meek and a quiet spirit.

THE RETURNING ARK.

CHAPTER VI.

DAVID SEEKS GOD'S GLORY. UZZAH SMITTEN. DAVID IS DISPLEASED. DAVID'S FEELINGS. HE DANCES BEFORE THE ARK. DANCING. NAKED DAVID. MICHAL LAUGHS AT DAVID. DAVID'S ANSWER.

IT is necessary to recollect that the ark, which was the symbol of the presence of the God of Israel, and was kept in the holy of holies, between the cherubim, had not been known or seen by the high priest for a great many years. David felt it, therefore, his first duty to honour God, to seek his kingdom and his righteousness, and to commence the dawning splendours of a magnificent reign by an act that was at once patriotic and religious, dutiful to his country and honouring to his God. He accordingly "arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale, of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts, that dwelleth between the cherubims." And when he brought this ark out, the nation paid every visible and audible homage, by instruments of music, harps, and psalteries, and a great multitude accompanied it, to show honour and deference to it. An incident occurs in the midst of this. Uzzah, who was not a Levite, and had therefore no right to touch the ark, out of mistaken, though sincere zeal, did so.

There followed a very severe dispensation. God smote him, and he died for doing so. The reason is not fully explained; the fact itself is clearly asserted. Probably it was a signal act, inflicted not simply out of religious disapprobation, but for necessary discipline, to impress upon a rude and semi-barbarous people that reverence to divine things, that veneration for its own institutions which they were too apt to omit, forget, or despise. But what was the reason is not written, and we therefore are silent. David was displeased; but God did not choose to explain to David the necessity, the expediency, or the equity of the thing; leaving him and leaving us simply this inference—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" David shows on this occasion some weakness. He was evidently a man of strong feelings, vacillating in his judgment, a creature of impulse; and deformed—truth compels us to admit—with many grievous imperfections. On this occasion David was so alarmed at the signal instance of severity he had witnessed, that he was afraid, and said, "How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" So David would not "remove the ark of the Lord"—that is, he did not carry out that day his adopted design to bring it into Jerusalem, the city of David, but left it with a Levite of the name of Obbedom, where the ark continued for three months, David being afraid to have anything to do with the awful symbol, the mere touch of which, by Uzzah, had been visited with so signal and so consuming a judgment. It blessed Obbedom by its presence. So much was David the creature of feeling, that no sooner did he hear that Obbedom's house was blessed because he gave hospitality to the *ark of God*, than he instantly resolved to send for it,

and to bring it to Jerusalem with all possible pomp and *éclat* ; that is, as long as he thought there was danger, like a coward he shrunk, and left the ark to all contingencies, but when he saw that to have the ark was not necessarily to incur Uzzah's judgment, perhaps, to obtain Obedom's blessing, he then comes round, and takes the ark, and professes all that reverence and veneration for it which perhaps was sincere, but which faltered when he thought there was peril in it. How like is ancient to modern human nature ! When a thing is very profitable, it is most popular ; but when there is any risk about it, or any danger, or any sacrifice required, or any trouble, or any inconvenience, how many ingenious and plausible excuses do we find for letting it alone ! I think the traits of human nature brought out in this inspired history are so varied, so striking, so true, that the facts themselves are their own credentials ; and the exhibitions that they give of the human heart are the proofs that He that made the moral organism of the heart inspired the history of these incidents, so purely and simply told.

Then, when David brought the ark up, it is said he danced before it. Dancing was then a religious ceremony ; it has now become an amusement : and some think a criminal, others think a sinful, others think a very unbecoming amusement. Certainly, as far as moving one's feet is concerned, there can be no more sin in this than in moving one's hands, and therefore to dance cannot be more sinful intrinsically than to speak, or to walk, or to wield a stick, or in any way to use the limbs which God has given us. It is the accompaniments—and I am not a judge of them—that

give some offence ; it is the consequences—and I am not a judge of them—that give others offence. And therefore, I think, that instead of publicly condemning, it would be better to say to any one, When you become an enlightened Christian, you will in all likelihood feel a distaste for these things. If you are not a Christian, there is no use in arguing with you about it. Solomon says there is a time to dance,—but that time I have never yet been able to discover : it is not the time of suffering, it is not the time of sorrow, it is not the time of bereavement. You can certainly quote in defence of this amusement, “There is a time to dance ;” and if any one will oblige by specifying the time, I shall be exceedingly gratified, for I have not yet been able to discover it. Now, it is said here that David danced naked before the ark of the Lord. I need not tell you that the word “naked,” used in Scripture, means laying off the upper robe,—in his case the royal robe, which was the symbol of a king,—and dancing, as it is said expressly in the passage, girded with a linen ephod, which was the common robe of the common people. What David did, therefore, that excited such merriment in Saul’s daughter, was really that he laid aside the pomp and splendour of a king, and joined the crowd like one of the people,—probably in his heart feeling that in acts of religious worship there is no distinction but one—saints by grace and sinners by nature. However, this Michal, who seems to have been a person very much given to laughter, and very apt to find food for it in trifling occurrences, thought it was excessively undignified—as certainly it did so look—in a royal personage to join a crowd, and *commence dancing in the most ecstatic and excited manner*

with the rest of the multitude before the ark of the God of Israel; she therefore laughed at him, called him a vain fellow, said it was very shameless of a king to lay aside his royal robe, and appear like a common person, forgetting that at the grave kings and their subjects must lay down the first their purple, and the second their rags, and as men, and only as men, stand at the judgment-seat of God. David's answer was a very admirable one. If you call this vile, I will be yet more vile, for I do not mean to change what I have been doing, believing it to be my duty. So if a person does something that you find fault with, if he feel it to be the path of duty, his answer would be, If you call this objectionable, I mean to be yet more objectionable, for I have ascertained that it is my duty, and what is duty is always beautiful before God; and if it be vile in your sight, it is not because duty is black, but because your moral eyesight is so dim.

THE TEMPLE BUILDER.

CHAPTER VII.

DAVID'S ZEAL FOR THE HOUSE OF THE LORD. NATHAN'S ADVICE.
GOD'S REPLY. CHOICE OF SOLOMON. THE TRUE DAVID. BE-
COMING FEELING. PRAYER.

IN the midst of all the sins and shortcomings of David there break forth at times from the depths of his heart those true and noble feelings that indicate that, however turbid at times the mere current on the surface was, there were the depths of real religion deep down, clear and calm below. And accordingly, when David here "sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies, the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains,"—a most just and Christian sentiment. Shall I serve God with nought? Shall I provide for myself a splendid house, its very beams of cedar, and shall I leave the ark of God, the visible symbol and memorial of his presence and his glory, merely within curtains, and carried from place to place, and liable to all the contingencies of transit over all the land? This thought was a most just and proper one. How often, however, do Christians think most of their own things, and least of the things of God? how often do we expend upon the mere luxuries of the taste twofold,

sometimes tenfold, what we expend in promoting the use of the means of grace, and the opportunities of salvation. I do not say that we are to spend in this present economy our disposable wealth in building magnificent cathedrals. Probably the age for that is gone. We want now places of worship, not palaces for beauty and for grandeur. At the same time, we ought never to leave the Lord's house altogether a barn, nor ought we to regard his service as the last thing, but in all things we should seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and then all other things will be added unto us.

When David made this comparison, so creditable to his own good feelings, Nathan the prophet said to the king, thinking he was inspired to say so, "Go, do all that is in thine heart,"—that is, get cedar, and stones, and labourers, and raise this house, that shall eclipse all houses in glory and in beauty. But no sooner had Nathan thus said than God interposed, and undeceived him. Nathan spoke unadvisedly, not what he was inspired to say, but what seemed reasonable and right under the circumstances. God therefore said, "Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel, spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?" I never complained of this; I never said, You are neglecting a great duty; and, therefore, as

I have never complained, nor made any request whatever, however dutiful it was in David to entertain the suggestion, and to make the comparison, when I have delivered him from all his enemies, yet, tell him, "I took thee from the shepcote, a poor shepherd boy, from following the sheep to feed them in their pastures; and I made thee, not by thy merits, but by my race, king and ruler over my people Israel; I have been with thee in all thy ways, I have cut off thine enemies, I have even given thee an illustrious name, and made thee celebrated as a ruler amid the kings and rulers of the earth. And moreover, it is in my mind to appoint a place for my people Israel; I do design that they shall have a place to dwell in, and that they shall have a permanent abode. Also the Lord will make thee an house. And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee"—that is Solomon,—“and I will establish this kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom forever.” Why this arrangement was made we have only faint reasons of explanation—namely, that David was a warrior, involved in ceaseless conflicts, and this apparent cessation of war was not a permanent peace, but only a bivouac for him and his army—a respite in the midst of the battle—a shaft of sunshine amid the black, and lowering, and tempestuous clouds, and therefore God reserved for Solomon, whose name, literally translated, means the peaceful and the perfect one—the great type of Christ in his official capacity—the dignity of building a house for the Lord God of Israel. Then he states how he will treat Solomon—that he will chasten him

as a son, but not cast him off, and that David's house, through him, his successor, shall be established for ever. This seems at first a strong expression, but if you understand that by David's house being established for ever was meant David's kingdom, dynasty, and throne, as a moral and spiritual, not merely a temporal thing, then you will see how just it is. What is the proper name of our blessed Lord? David. When the Spirit descended like a dove, and spoke to those that were the hearers and witnesses, he said, "This is"—in our translation—"my beloved Son; in the Greek it is my beloved; but, translated into Hebrew, it would be, "This is my David, in whom I am well pleased"—that is to say, the David who has fallen asleep did not please me, but this is the true David—this is the king of Israel, whose reign shall never cease, but shall spread with accumulating years.

When David heard this he went in, and did not complain. Now, here is another beautiful trait in David's character—he did not complain; but, on the contrary, he felt thankful. He said, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" Once a shepherd-boy—now the ruler of a people among whom are symptoms of restlessness that I cannot subdue. What am I? Laden with sins, about to plunge into great crime; what am I, therefore, O Lord, and what is my house? No ancient, illustrious house, but the creation of yesterday. "Who am I, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" And then he says, "For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know." He gives God all the glory.

“DO AS THOU HAST SAID.”

CHAPTER VII. 25.

THIS chapter will at first seem barren and unsuggestive, and will be judged by the mere superficial reader as very trivial and incidental. It is, however, most important to remember that in God's book there is not a comma, nor a colon, nor a full-point, which he has put there, for which there is not a reason, even the highest reason. There is not a sentence inspired by the Spirit, written or spoken by any one of his amanuenses, from the first verse of Genesis to the last of the Apocalypse, that is not replete with meaning, if we have only the skill and expend the study and research in extracting and bringing it forth. These words, “Do as thou hast said to thy servant Dayid,” seem to me to contain many suggestions, the study of which, by God's blessing, will not be unprofitable to us. “God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.” We have in the Epistle to the Hebrews substantially the same sentiment that is here—namely, that the silence of the ages has been broken; that intolerable silence that all intelligent creation felt, and in which it

longed and yearned for God to say one word to his erring and fallen children, at length is broken; that silence which Socrates and Plato, Seneca and Cicero, prayed might one day be broken, and that God one day they prophesied, as well as prayed, would break. They knew not that God had spoken, they wished that the silence might one day be broken, and that they might hear— orphan children as they felt they were—one sweet, touching, tender, compassionate word from Him they believed, in spite of difficulties, clouds, and darkneses, to be, notwithstanding, and over all, their Father. Our Saviour says, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;" it is no less true, my Father has been speaking hitherto, and I speak. He has spoken clearly; but a sin-stained, troubled, stormy atmosphere has not conveyed in all their sweetness his own musical utterances. God has spoken; but man's ear has grown hard and dull in its sensibilities, and man's heart is become impervious to truth by reason of sin. Once, however, in Paradise—that mystery that will never cease to be a memory—every footprint of Deity was a type, every whisper of wind and wave was instruction, every star in the sky, and every flower on the earth, was a lesson book. But sin came in, and has washed out the footprints of God, and the earthquake and the hurricane have disturbed earth's beautiful proportions. Where God was clearly revealed, we see him at times so dimly that in our madness and our folly we dare to call aloud, what we try to cherish as a conviction, there is no God. There is not a flower that blossoms in the field, however exquisite its tints, that has not these tints more or less dimmed and darkened by the breath of sin.

ere is not a star in the sky, however beautiful,
 ing on the brow of night, that has not had its
 re impaired by sin. There is not a voice in
 ure that is not modified and altered by sin. God
 spoken. Where does he speak now? He speaks
 in creation. It is true, as I have said, our ears
 very deaf, our sensibilities very blunted, but still
 hear and He speaks. What is the thunder? an
 ertone of God's grand voice, which the hills with
 overed heads reverently listen to and repeat to each
 er in endless reverberations. What is the wind,
 en it whispers in the zephyr, or when it howls in
 hurricane? It is God's voice making known the
 tleness and the majesty and greatness of Deity by
 ns. And what is the ocean? That great instru-
 nt by which God speaks in his grandest accents,
 of which he brings involved and intricate but
 rious harmonies,—the waves the white-robed cho-
 ers, the margin of the sea the resounding answer
 their music and embraces, and the fingers of the
 strel winds evermore drawing out its treasured
 sic. What are the lightnings? God's messen-
 s. What are the clouds? the dust of his feet as
 travels in his majesty to save and to deliver. God
 aks to us also every day in the opening blossoms
 spring, in the ripening fruits of summer, in the
 den harvests of autumn, in the song of the birds,
 he hum of bees, in the murmur of the streams that
 rushing downward to the sea. God speaks to
 ry one who will open his ear, and reverently listen.
 at are the flowers? the smiles of God. What
 the dewdrops? the very jewellery of heaven,
 reflecting God in his varied and resplendent

attributes. What are all of these, and analogous things, but the varied organs through which He speaks? Our world is not a dumb world; and whilst it may be true that we have another organ through which God speaks, it is fact, and we must not conceal the fact, that he speaks to us in the morning dawn, and in the silvery noon, and amid the shadows of the evening; he speaks to us from all heights, he calls to us from all depths. When a Christian's heart has been changed by grace, everything in nature is to him eloquent of God. God spake of old in another way; he spake from Mount Sinai; and the first rolling sentence made all Israel quake, and even Moses, God's meek servant, quaked; and all the people that heard the withering and intolerable voice—not because God's voice was unmusical, but because their consciences were guilty—implored him that he would not speak to them any more. But God speaks to us, in strains of softer music, in the page of his own glorious and blessed gospel. One sentence from the gospel is worth infinitely more than all that nature speaks, or Sinai thunders; that sentence is, "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but have eternal life."

The apostle refers, however, not to creation, with its blotted page; not to Sinai, with its thunder and its lightning, and its voice of words that the people could not bear; but to that last revelation through which God speaks to us—his own inspired word. What and where is it? In such small compass that a child may carry it, but rich in a magnificence no study can exhaust, that book whose history has nothing before it, and whose prophecy leaves nothing beyond it; from which

kings may derive lessons for their rule, and children texts for their guidance, and all mankind may learn the way that leads to heaven. The Bible, therefore, is the perfect organ of the utterance of God. God has spoken to us in this book, clearly and intelligibly. What is, then, the first thing we must do? Believe what he has said. If this book be God's book, my first duty is to accept it as God's word, and believe it. We must not only believe it, but we must also acquiesce in what he says. We believe many things we do not acquiesce in; but when there is true Christian faith we not only believe what God has said, but we acquiesce in what God has said. It may be a very difficult truth, it may be above our comprehension, though never against our reason; but if God has said it, it is our first duty to believe it—it is our second to acquiesce in it.

It is delightful to know that God is pledged to do all that he has said. What a glorious truth is here! His faithfulness, his justice, his love, are all committed to carry out every promise he has made, every threatening he has uttered; and so thoroughly that he has told us, "Heaven and earth may pass away, but not one jot or tittle shall fall from my word until all be fulfilled." If God has spoken to us in the Bible, if we believe it, if we acquiesce in it, can we now say, "O Lord, do as thou hast said; make actual what is spoken, carry out the propositions of thy word into the facts, the phenomena, the experience, and the acts of mankind?"

But let us go into some details, however briefly, and we shall see what is implied in this prayer, "Do as thou hast said." I have mentioned one great saying, "God *so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son,*

that whosoever believeth in him may have eternal life." O Lord, thou hast said it, I believe what thou hast said; give me then what thou hast said thou wilt give—eternal life. If you can really say so, and if there be truth in the Bible, it is salvation. God has said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." It does not matter how far you have to travel, even if it should be from the husks of the prodigal to the home of your father, or that you come with faltering footstep, hesitating heart, trembling spirit, and clouded brow, and doubting mind; the promise is not to him that cometh boldly, him that cometh speedily, him that cometh from a little distance; but to him that cometh: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." An excellent Christian said, in deep distress and despondency, "I can see what God has provided, but the difficulty is believing, coming to him, resting upon him, embracing him." He found the text, "Whosoever is athirst, let him come," but he said, "I cannot come; I am poor, weak, worthless, and helpless." He read on, and found another text where "come" was left out, "I will give to him that is athirst of the water of life," and he said that gave him comfort. In other words, God has laid no condition upon us—such is the exuberance of his mercy—but the sense of ruin and the belief of the provision of restoration, pardon, sanctification, and peace. Are you bowed down with a sense of sin; does your conscience, like the consciences of us all, show that its accusations outnumber its excuses; are you constrained often to say, "I have the will to do what I do not seem to have the power to do?" There is provision for you; God has said of all your sins, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth

us from all sin." In other words, all your sins, in reference to the efficacy of that precious sacrifice, are no more than sand ridges before the wave of the advancing tide, or like the Egyptians in the Red Sea—not one shall stand upon the opposite side to condemn, as you seize a better than Miriam's harp, and sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb. What a glorious truth, that each evening as the sun sets, like the Israelite of old who had recourse to his evening lamb sacrifice, we can have recourse to our evening and everlasting sacrifice, and feel under the overshadowing wings of Omnipotence itself! Let my sins condemn me, let my conscience upbraid me; here is my shelter, here my refuge, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin." Or does another one say, I am faint, weary, desponding, and often almost despairing; and sometimes I give up all for lost, and think I had better renounce Christianity and the means of grace altogether? I have no doubt you have such feelings; you would not be a Christian if you had not some conflict; but when these conflicting feelings come, when these doubts, and fears, and perplexities emerge from the depths of the heart, and trouble you, what has God said? "The mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but my loving-kindness shall not depart, and the covenant of my peace shall not be removed." "I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee." "Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world." "A mother may forget her infant, that she should not have compassion on the fruit of her womb; but I will not forget thee." When you read these brilliant promises, add, "Amen; O Lord, do as thou hast said." Do you think he will

refuse? If he were to refuse, he would not be God. If you could produce in this world, or at the margin of the eternal state, a solitary proof that God refused to answer a single real prayer, I would cast away the Bible as an imposition. You will say, "I have asked many things; I have asked for money, for fame, for greatness, and for power;" and you add, "I have never felt that God gave them." I answer, ask still whatever you feel you need, and God will either give you what you ask, if it be good for you, or he will give you the same thing in another shape. If you ask a pound, and if a person give you twenty shillings, it is as good; if he give you 240 pence, it is the same; or if he give you what it represents, it is equally good; if he give it in the shape of books, or clothes, or food, it is just as good. You ask the thing in that formula in which you think you need it, and God will give you the thing, but not, perhaps, in the formula in which you ask it, but in one far more expedient and convenient for you. Do you complain that you are in deep depression and distress; that you are bereaved; that the loss of some that were near and dear to you has left in your home a vacancy, and in your heart a chasm, that time with all its trophies and its gifts will not be able to fill? I answer, that is very likely; but if it had not been absolutely essential, it would not have been. In the language of Peter, there is "a needs be" for the bitterest blow that is dealt; and there is this blessed thought—the hand that smites thee, believer, is that very hand that was nailed to the cross for thee, O sinner! God chooses, we are told, his people, not in the palace of Pharaoh, but in the brick-kilns of Israel; not on couches of roses, but in the fur-

nance ; in affliction and trouble he often fashions his favourite weapons ; and your afflictions, instead of being proofs that God is your enemy, are proofs that he is taking particular pains with you ; and what you are sometimes tempted to think are tokens that God hates you, are the very signatures of Deity, the very evidence of his presence. Say to him, then, when He makes all his promises to you as to what he will do for you, and what he will do with you, "Do, Lord, as thou hast said ; and the flinty road I will tread with comfort, because of the bright scene at its end ; the bitter cup I will drink with contentment, because of the sweet that is in the bottom of it ; it is good for me to be afflicted, because all tribulation, as thou hast promised, works to me for good ; do, O Lord, as thou hast said." And when you come to that hour that comes to all, when you must lay aside this coil of mortality, and the mysterious heart in the human bosom, that has made such strange and varied music through life's march, must dampen or cease its vibrations—when you come to that hour when you lie down upon the last bed, and no human will, not the mightiest upon earth, can be of the least earthly avail—oh, what a glorious promise is that, "When thou walkest through the valley of the shadow of death, my rod and my staff they shall comfort you !" What an expression is that—"the valley of the shadow of death !"

Wherever there is in this world a shadow, there must be sunshine ; and if that valley have the shadow of death, then there must be the sunshine of the Sun of righteousness pouring on it ; and the very thing that seems to be its worst feature is the evidence *really of the presence of the Sun of righteousness*

even there. When, therefore, you look forward to that death-bed, on feeling death drawing near, you can say, "O Lord, who hast thus promised, do as thou hast said." And when the judgment morn comes, you will hear, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom;" "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life;" "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." And when at length, from the heights of glory, we review all the past, we shall be constrained to admit that not one word has failed. "Hath he spoken, and hath he not done it; hath he sworn, and hath it not come to pass?" You may appeal to angel and archangel, to the oldest saint in glory, and they will tell you that not one good thing has failed of what God spake. As we look forward into the world that now is, though some hearts are full of fears and forebodings, all the scenes which Ezekiel, and the sermon from the Mount of Olives, and the Apocalypse shadow forth, seem to be emerging from beneath the horizon, and what were supposed to be fanatics' dreams are beginning to be found to be historic facts,—yet we need not fear; we are sure that the worst convulsions of the world are only ploughing up the soil for the seeds of glorious harvests. We look abroad to India, and read the issues of what has taken place there, and deplore the savage barbarism which has put to death the inoffensive and the innocent, the useful and the good. We feel that retribution is due; we are sure it is to open out a new and more glorious chapter in the history of that magnificent land. God has said, "The whole earth shall be filled with my glory;" God has said, "To me every knee shall bow, to me every tongue shall confess:" we can add, "Do as thou hast said:"

and if there be truth in the Bible, the whole earth shall be filled with his glory, the whole ocean shall be covered with his presence ; and the louder the storm, the blacker the night, the more terrible the convulsion, the nearer we are to that peaceful and permanent scene where there will be no more sorrow, nor war, nor tears, nor trouble, nor death ; but the Prince of peace shall reign over a world at peace with God, and all its nations at peace with each other.

PRINCIPLE AND POLICY.

CHAPTER VIII.

VARIED INTEREST OF THE BIBLE. SPARING THE CANAANITES.
JUSTICE IS MERCY AND POLICY.

WE are not to expect every chapter in the Bible to be replete with the interest that we find in most. We shall discover in God's written word what we find in God's created world,—spots that have all the fertility and the beauty of Eden, and other places that are bleak, untrodden, and seemingly forsaken. But we shall find that the places that look least lovely on the surface are not without important uses. Gold mines sleep beneath the deserts of the earth; and where the surface is covered with fertility and beauty, the contents of the earth are of least value. So it may be in many portions of God's word where there is the least of poetry, or the least of personal interest, there may lie hid beneath links and bonds of connection with great facts, with distant events, with moral truths, that when brought up by the search and the exploration of the careful student, will be seen and felt to bear as visibly the trace of the image of God, as those parts that we are more accustomed to appreciate and admire. This chapter may not belong altogether to this class; certainly it shows one thing, that David and the whole of *the rulers of the country had at length been awakened to*

their neglected duties ; namely, their having spared the guilty inhabitants of the land out of a false mercy, instead of exterminating the whole according to the commandment of God. God's command was, that all the Canaanites—that is, the aborigines of the land of Palestine—should be put to death. This strikes us as a severe sentence ; but when you recollect it was the Judge of all the earth that pronounced it, and that he pronounced it on clearly proved evidence of great and scandalous guilt, you will then see that in his ordering such a sentence to be executed, there was no room for the gratification of David's personal resentment, or of an Israelite's private revenge ; but simply their being appointed as the executioners of the just and righteous sentence of the Judge of all the earth. Some of the Israelites believed that it would be more merciful to spare the Canaanites. They did so ; and what was the consequence ? They were thorns and briars in their sides during all the rest of their national history ; in order to teach us that God's command, when it seems severe, is really, all things considered, the most merciful : and never is mercy so misplaced as when it is exerted at the expense and the sacrifice of righteousness, justice, and truth. Would it, for instance, have been justice, or even expediency and policy, to have spared the guilty and criminal assassins who rose against their officers,—I mean the Sepoy assassins,—and murdered them without a moment's notice ? Would not our country be guilty of the greatest cruelty to the vast population of India, and to our countrymen there, if from a mistaken sense of tenderness, and kindness, and compassion, they were to spare where duty summons *them to strike*, and to pity where the duty is so obvious

in the most marked manner to punish? We shall always find, therefore, in the history of nations, that justice is mercy, that you never can be merciful if you are unjust; and that adherence to duty is always and everywhere the highest and the noblest expediency.

David had awakened to all this in relation to Canaan; and this accounts for the constant record of his successful slaughters, I may call them, among the Philistines, the Moabites, and the subjects of Hadad-ezer, and the various tribes that remained: and that he did right is evident from the fact that "the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went," twice repeated; he preserved him because he was carrying out his own prescription, doing the duty that devolved upon him; and, so far, he was leading his people to that prosperity and expanding greatness, which Jerusalem and Palestine attained in the days of Solomon.

A NOBLE TRAIT.

CHAPTER IX.

UNGRATEFUL SUCCESS.

WE cannot but frequently be struck with numerous and beautiful traits developed in the character of David, as he approached to his meridian greatness as the monarch and ruler of all Israel. There were great defects, scandalous sins, grievous departures from the way and the commandment of his God; and yet there seems to have survived all a root of true religion, throwing forth leaf, and fruit, and blossom, often the most fragrant and most seasonable. One of the very fine traits exhibited by David here, is one perhaps too rare in a fallen world; it is not universally true, but the page of history shows it is too frequently true, that those who climb successfully to power are the first to kick away the ladder by which they rose to power. But David felt that it ought not to be so; and being raised himself to the highest dignity that could be enjoyed, in the providence of God, the very first thought that occurred to him was, Are there any connected with me, either by ties of blood, or friendship, or association, who have seen better days, but have sunk deep down, and are desolate, and suffering, and oppressed? What fine feeling is here! to look around, to make the lofty pinnacle

he rose to, and which commanded the widest horizon, the sphere on which his sympathizing heart looks around and inquires if there be a sufferer he can comfort; any in distress that he can succour, or any cast down that with his royal hand he may be the means of raising up. Let every one act upon that Christian principle. If developed by a Christian in the dawn, surely it ought to be exhibited by every Christian in the noonday light. It is a human feeling; it is higher still,—it is a Christian one. And if we wish the position that we occupy to be permanent as it is dignified, we shall ever remember that the largest sympathy with others is the greatest security to ourselves. God blesses that man that feels it his happiness to be a blessing to others. To return good for good is human; to return evil for good is fiendish; to return good for evil, is god-like and divine. David had received much evil from the hands of Saul; he owed him nothing in the way of gratitude for his goodness and his kindness towards him; for he had been persecuted, and misrepresented, and misapprehended by him, and injured in all respects in his person, in his property, in his friends. But David buries Saul's sins in oblivion; brings up in his memory the lights, far brighter than the shadows, of Saul's character; and uses his prosperity as a means of doing good even to his grandson, though Saul had done him so much evil in the course of his lifetime. Accordingly he sends his servant Ziba, bids him inquire if there be anybody left, grandson or son, of Saul; he finds out Mephibosheth, a poor lame lad, unable to take care of himself, or to do anything for himself, and *the more helpless because he had seen far better days,*

and lived in a very different outward social condition. We pity the poor, the degraded, and debased, who are so and have been so ; and we ought to pity them : but of all pitiable persons, and of all that most demand sympathy and succour,—not in the rough, rude way in which charity is ordinarily flung in a poor beggar's face, but in the gentle and kind way, which gives and seems rather to receive,—of all that demand our sympathy and succour, those that have fallen from high estate have claims the most urgent and pressing ; and wherever there is a right Christian heart, that sympathy and succour will never be withheld. David in acting thus did nobly ; inasmuch as he did not suffer mere policy to interfere. There are kingdoms not very remote from us where the last dynasty keeps a preceding dynasty at arm's length, afraid to do what might be dutiful, or to give what might be generous, lest a rival should start up in the palace and around the throne. David did not think, fear, or do thus. Apart from the principle involved, David's conduct was the best policy ; for after all, the policy of loving-kindness is power, and beauty, and blessedness. You never can force men into loyalty and obedience : you may win them, and draw them ; by the exercise of great love and generosity, and self-sacrifice, you may change a foe into a friend, an opponent into an ally ; and instead of introducing a traitor that saps the foundations of your throne, you may conciliate an ally that will be one of its props and its bulwarks. David thought so, and acted upon this. And he not only did this, but, what was a very noble thing, he said, I will not only give you a pension, and send you off to another country, but I will take you into my confidence ; and on public

occasions, for that is the meaning of the expression, "thou shalt eat bread at my table;" not in private, but on great public and official occasions you shall occupy the place of a prince. "And Ishbosheth said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldst look upon such a dead dog as I am?" How mutable is human greatness! Thirty-four years before the event recorded here, Saul was the mightiest sovereign of the mightiest realm; his children were princes, and David was a shepherd boy. But how are matters now changed! Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall; or rather, be not high-minded, but fear. The shepherd of to-day is the sovereign of to-morrow; the sovereign of yesterday is sometimes the miserable beggar of to-day. God putteth up one, and pulleth down another: power belongeth unto God alone; also, unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy.

EVIL RETURNED FOR GOOD.

CHAPTER X.

DAVID resolves to show kindness to the son in gratitude for kindness received from the father. He accordingly sends messengers to the sorrowing and the bereaved to convey his sympathy. An envious and uncharitable minister about Hanun suggested a construction of David's conduct alike cruel and unjust. It was said he had sent spies, not comforters.

This foolish prince believed these miserable tools, and sent back the servants of David in a plight anything but palatable—without beards, and half their dress cut off. The beard was never cut off, save as a sign of mourning or an evidence of slavery. The servants in modern seraglios have their beards shaven off in token of servitude. Arabs have been known to prefer death to the loss of their beard. The sequel of the chapter is not very interesting to us. The Ammonites and Syrians, banded together against David, are twice beaten. It is desirable we learn here always to put the best construction on what is even liable to doubt. Charity thinketh no evil. Better suffer an incidental injury than live in a state of ceaseless fear and misgiving in reference to those who may have hearts overflowing with kindness, and feel keenly the uncharitable constructions put on every attempt they make to *comfort* or to *help* us.

DAVID'S GREAT SIN.

CHAPTER XI.

THIS is the first dark cloud that settles on the history of David. He that permitted the sin orders its faithful record. A national Jewish writer would have left out the dark stain ; but God's word gives no profile view of human nature : it sets forth man as he is, and facts as they occurred.

David's mind and hands were on this occasion unoccupied. He was not really at his post of duty, and therefore he was in danger.

He saw a woman of surpassing beauty bathing. He made no covenant with his eyes. He gazed, and fell. The greatest sin has at its origin an incidental look, a light word, a rash deed. If these had been avoided, the ultimate iniquity had not been perpetrated. It is at the beginning of a diverging course that decision is alike duty and success. Temptation generated impure and ardent passion ; and passion, especially this passion, armed with power, took possession of the whole heart of the king, and set it on fire. To conceal the effects of his sin, as well as to keep it secret, he has recourse to desperate and terribly depraved criminality. Every sin requires for its concealment many more. He plots and brings about, by the instigation of Satan, the death of the husband of Bathsheba, the brave, the loyal, and

honourable Uriah. Bathsheba, a widow, now becomes David's wife by his marrying her. He had several wives, according to the corrupt polygamy tolerated by reason of the hardness of their hearts, but now done away in the New Testament. But this did not then, as it does not now, prevent foul crimes. Watch against the beginning of sin. It may be crushed in the bud,—it is invincible if entertained. Read and pray over Proverbs, chap. vii. "Lead us not into temptation." Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. God sees always and everywhere. May we ever feel "Thou, God, seest me." No sin so darkens the mind, deadens the sensibilities, and predisposes to cruelty and crime, as the criminal indulgence of sensual passions: "Flee youthful lusts which war against the soul." "Almighty God, to whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit." How horrible a sin is drunkenness! David made Uriah drink to excess in order to make him more easily the victim of his wicked and murderous designs. Let none quote the sin of David as a precedent. It is, if rightly read, a solemn warning; and he who pleads it as an encouragement to sin, tries to extract poison out of the word of God.

David's repentance and deep sorrow are worthy of our study. That one sin cast a shadow over all his subsequent years.

NATHAN'S PARABLE.

CHAPTER XII.

DAVID'S conscience had fallen asleep, the very memory of his sin had been almost effaced, and if any transient sensibility remained, it perished soon amid the splendour and excitements of a court. God cared for David, and pitied him when he cared nothing for himself, and therefore sent Nathan the prophet to awaken within him repentance, and humiliation, and confession, lest he should perish with the world. Nathan conveys his lesson in the form of an exquisitely beautiful narrative, or parable, so shaped that David should be led unconsciously and undesignedly to pronounce judgment on himself. A very slight allusion awakes the recollection of sin—a spark kindles the slumbering fires of conscience. The criminality that David, with true moral instinct, reprobated and condemned, was less than his own. The punishment he pronounced on the criminal was less than he deserved himself. But he did not see his own face in the mirror till the prophet gave utterance to the crushing words, "Thou art the man!" The king of Israel now felt poor, and wretched, and undone. These words pierced his heart, and aroused his conscience, and his soul sinks within him as the prophet enumerates his crimes in succession, and proclaims the anger of God, and predicts the judgments

that would cleave to David's house. His punishment would evermore suggest his crime. God absolves David from the eternal guilt of his sin on his confession of it to him, but allows the public effects of a great public crime to track David's steps to the grave. A great criminal may be truly penitent, but his crime drives him from society, and degrades him through life, and hangs on him like a cloud all the rest of his days. Public sins in public men are openly visited. It is necessary that it should be so. David's infant dies in spite of his prayers, and entreaties, and cries. David, gazing on the babe's pale face, says what is so just and true, "I shall go to Him." All infants dying in infancy go to heaven. Here too is David's expectation of and belief in a future life, and the immortality of the soul. Let us never quote David's sin as a precedent. It is a beacon, a buoy on the reef, a warning to him that standeth to take heed lest he fall. David's grief is embodied in Psalm li., and is evidently that godly sorrow which worketh repentance, not to be repented of. The afflictions which that sin brought down were to him chastisements. There is much in the holiest to humble and abase. There is indeed forgiveness with God, that he may be feared. As Psalm li. was the litany David lifted up on this occasion, let us turn to it for instruction.

The punishment inflicted on the people of Rabbah, described in verse 31, was not what the words seem to convey. A Nana Sahib alone could have perpetrated such barbarities. The preposition rendered "under" should be rendered "to." He did not kill them by these instruments, but he sentenced them to work at *and with them*.

RETRIBUTIONS.

CHAPTER XIII.

THIS chapter is a dark portrait of human nature; yet not darker than the original. The chapter is not suitable for family reading. But in its place it is no less important as a proof of the fearful depths of human corruption, and of the unsleeping retribution that follows sin. David sees in his son the reproduction of his own sin, and feels in it the fulfilment of the judicial sentence pronounced through Nathan on him and his. Lust is not love. The former is turned into hate by gratification; the latter is strengthened day by day.

Names are not always things: Amnon means faithful, Tamar the palm-tree, and Absalom his father's peace.

“If judgment begin at the house of God, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel?”

ABSALOM.

CHAPTER XIV.

ABSALOM AND JOAB. THE WOMAN OF TEKOA. HER STORY.
THE KING SEES JOAB'S GENIUS IN THE TALE. JOAB'S RE-
QUEST IS GRANTED. EULOGY ON ABSALOM. TRUE BEAUTY.
BASE INGRATITUDE.

THE historic facts leading to the exquisitely touching parable related by the woman of Tekoah, at the instigation of Joab, a crafty courtier in Israel, are these. Absalom had committed a great crime—a crime followed by murder. The law of the land of which he was a native required death, immediate death, as the just penalty. Absalom, to escape the vengeance of the law he had outraged, and the avengers of blood who pursued him, had retired to a distance in order to hide himself, and thus have protection. During that time Joab, who wished to make favour with Absalom, and thought perhaps he might succeed in acquiring power with the king, resolved to make an effort, extremely ingenious and very plausible, to restore Absalom to the king's palace and presence, and to reinstate him in the affections that he had justly forfeited. Knowing that Nathan had wrought so powerfully on David by his exquisitely touching parable of the ewe lamb, he supposed that David's idiosyncrasy of nature and character was of that *stamp*, that a parable would take effect when

a mere appeal would prove powerless and uninfluential. Joab, therefore, with great tact and skill, and, judging from the words, with much persuasive eloquence, hits upon an ingenious parable, in order to touch the king's heart, and pledge him, before he was well aware, to take Absalom back to his country, his palace, and his home. For this purpose he selects a woman, who would speak with the greatest effect, because possessed of the greatest sensibility, and who should present herself, with persuasive eloquence, in the attitude of a widow, a sufferer, and one exposed to peril. He selects a woman not living near David's house, lest the plot might be detected; he sends off eight miles to Tekoah, a neighbouring village, and finds this woman, unknown to the king and the courtiers, and instructs her how she is to act; and a more consummate actor, or rather actress, he could not possibly have selected; for with immense tact, with undaunted perseverance, and ultimately with complete success, she appeals to the king, answers every objection, combats every difficulty, and before he is well aware, he has given his word that Absalom shall be so far restored.

The story is as follows. The woman of Tekoah fell on her face, the attitude of profound reverence, and did obeisance, and in the agony of apparent distress cried, "Help, O King." The king, always accessible to his subjects in distress, instantly asked her, "What aileth thee?" She told her story. "I am a widow woman," which was quite true, "and mine husband is dead," which was also quite true—whether the rest was true I cannot say; "and thy handmaid had two sons, and they two strove together in the field, and there was none to part them, but the one smote the

other, and slew him." And the consequence is, the remaining members of the family are determined to destroy the one who was guilty of the fratricide. She adds in beautiful words, showing that Joab was a poet as well as an orator when he inspired her, there will not be "left one live coal" upon my hearth; that is, one fragment of comfort, one thing to remind me of a fire that once burnt brightly, and of blessings, and happiness, and concord that surrounded it, and grew up in its light and warmth. The king then said, "Go to thine house, and I will give charge concerning thee." One would have thought this was all she wanted. But she said, "My lord, O king, the iniquity be on me, and on my father's house; and the king and his throne be guiltless. And the king said, Whosoever saith ought unto thee, bring him to me, and he shall not touch thee any more. Then said she, I pray thee, let the king remember the Lord thy God, that thou wouldst not suffer the avengers of blood to destroy any more, lest they destroy my son. And he said, As the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth. Then the woman said, Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak one word unto my lord, the king. And he said, Say on. And the woman said, Wherefore then hast thou thought such a thing against the people of God? for the king doth speak this thing as one which is faulty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished." In other words, you are willing to protect me and mine, and to keep my poor coal from being quenched upon my hearth; but you forget that you have a coal, once upon your hearth, but long separated from it, that will be soon *quenched unless you take it and restore it to the place*

it belongs to ; and, therefore, you are really contradicting yourself, and showing in reference to another a mercy and sympathy which you do not show in reference to your own ; or why do you not bring home your own banished Absalom ? As to your keeping up wrath and inflicting vengeance, says the woman, with great feeling, “ We must needs die ”— there is the equality of the human race—“ and are as water spilt on the ground ; ” and thus there is no time for revenge. In some eastern lands, in ancient times, instead of putting dust into the grave at the burial of the dead, they poured water into it, as a token of man’s transience and frailty, “ which cannot be gathered up again, neither doth God respect any person,” rich or poor ; he deals impartially with all ; “ yet,” she says beautifully, “ doth he devise means that his banished be not expelled from him,” that is to say, You are keeping up a spirit of revenge which it is now alike expedient and dutiful to quench, under the semblance of the execution of punishment. She says, God has mercy ; he does not cast off his banished for ever ; he does not leave the prodigal to feed on husks for ever, but he devises means—the means of a perfect, glorious, and all-sufficient atonement—by which those banished from Eden through sin to the uttermost extremities of the blighted universe, may be reclaimed, and brought home to their Father’s fireside, and to the shelter of their Father’s roof-tree, and so be happy for ever. “ Now, therefore, I am come to speak of this thing unto my lord the king, it is because the people have made me afraid ; and thy handmaid said, I will now speak unto the king ; it may be that the king will perform the request of his handmaid. The word of my lord the

king shall now be comfortable, for as an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad." I read in a newspaper that in India the Hindoo—I fear too often guilty of speaking lies and practising hypocrisy, as recent events have fearfully developed—usually says when he speaks with a European, "Sahib can do everything, he can do anything, his power is great; Sahib can do what he pleases;" meaning to pay a sort of compliment to the European, that on the lips of the Hindoo probably means little or nothing, while to the ear of the European it sounds probably as flattery that has made him trust, generously trust, where perhaps severer, and more penetrating, and less charitable judgments would have suspected, and been safe.

The king, having heard this beautiful and touching story, was too acute in his perceptions not to suspect something. I dare say he thought within himself, no widow of Tekoah ever could have got up that fine piece of eloquence; it is a composition too beautiful, too pointed, and too well put together, and with too many bright lights and relieving shadows in it, to be the composition of this poor widow woman of Tekoah: and with great penetration the king said, "Is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this?" I see the "fine Roman hand," I trace in all this story the talent, the skill, and the pathos which I know to be the intellectual prerogative, almost the monopoly, of that clever but very crafty courtier. The woman, with great candour, acknowledged it was all true, that she was repeating from memory, and that she was acting her part; that she had done her best as an actress, and that the whole thing had originated with Joab. The king was not displeased with the disclosure, for

he instantly sent for Joab, who probably was standing by amid the rest of the courtiers, watching the success of his experiment; "and Joab fell to the ground on his face, and bowed himself, and thanked," or blessed, the king; "and Joab said, To-day thy servant knoweth that I have found grace in thy sight, my lord, O king, in that the king hath fulfilled the request of his servant." How clever! He said, It is of no use discussing it with me; you have granted the thing; you have practically done so, in the personal tribunal of your own conscience, you have granted all I have asked. "And the king said unto Joab, Behold, now I have done this thing; go, therefore, bring the young man Absalom again." "So Joab arose, and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem."

There is an eulogium passed upon Absalom, to the effect that he was extremely handsome, that is, of imposing appearance, and it is said his hair was so heavy that when he polled it, it weighed two hundred shekels. Taking the fairest estimate of this it must have been three or three and a half pounds in weight. How is that possible? First, it was held a very unmanly thing to wear long hair; this is a woman's prerogative, not a man's, the apostle tell us. In the next place, it was the custom to put quantities of oil upon the hair, and the longer it was the more oil—perfumed oil—it would retain: and lastly, they were in the habit of dusting it with gold dust, and wreathing pieces of gold into the plaits as ornaments. Absalom was a sort of exquisite youth, who studied his personal appearance much more than he did his obligations to his father, or his responsibilities to his God—a type of many young men of the present day, who neglect the weighty duties

that belong to them, and think only what they shall eat and wherewithal they shall be clothed—than which nothing is more contemptible in a man, if it be very admirable, as I doubt, in a woman.

Let us see what this Absalom, so beautiful externally, was internally. His consummate impudence, ingratitude, and thorough baseness, showed that under a very fine form there may lurk a very bad heart. It is inner work that is beautiful. We should remember that after all there is no such thing as outward beauty of person, strictly so-called. It is the light, and radiance, and warmth of the inner man shining from the countenance that constitutes true beauty. It is not difficult to detect a dishonest man; I could almost specify a thief by walking behind him in the streets; there is something slouching and suspicious in all his movements, whereas wherever there is true, noble, magnanimous, Christian feeling, and the consciousness that all is as it should be between God and us, and between man and man, there is an openness, a candour, a fixity in the eye, and a firmness in the footstep that makes me agree with Socrates, the ancient philosopher, that beauty is all from within, it is not from without. Hence mark what followed in the case of Absalom. The moment that Joab did not attend to his rash, headstrong command to come to him, Absalom showed his gratitude for Joab's exposure of his own person to the wrath of the king by setting fire to Joab's fields of corn, in order, as it were, to stir up Joab, and make him listen to what he had got to say. Can you conceive a piece of grosser ingratitude or treachery than this? Poor Joab, mainly in all probability from fear, arose and came to Absalom,

and asked him why he had done this; and Absalom simply said, "All the good you have done me is not worth having; better I had stopped at Geahur than have come here, and been kept from living in the palace, and as a prince." Joab then went to the king and interceded for Absalom; forgetting the burning of his fields and the ingratitude of his *protégé*; and the king, in spite of the law which condemned a murderer to death, brought Absalom back to his palace. "David was inclined to favour Absalom, yet, for the honour of his justice, he could not do it but upon application made for him, which may show the methods of Divine grace. It is true that God has thoughts of compassion towards poor sinners, not willing that any should perish; yet he is only reconciled to them through a Mediator, who pleads on their behalf. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Nothing is said of Absalom's wisdom and piety. All here said of him is, that he was very handsome—a poor commendation for a man that had nothing else in him valuable. Many a polluted, deformed soul dwells in a fair and comely body. May the Lord grant us the beauty of holiness, and the adorning of a meek and quiet spirit!"

ABSALOM'S WICKEDNESS.

CHAPTER XV.

A DEMOCRAT. ABSALOM STEALS THE HEARTS OF DAVID'S SUBJECTS. ABSALOM GOES TO HEBRON. ABSALOM'S TREASON. DAVID LOSES HEART. ITTAI THE GITTITE.

THE first fact we find recorded in this chapter, is the ungrateful, unnatural, and treacherous apostasy of Absalom, as exhibited in his insurrection against the crown, the country, and the laws of his father David. We have in Absalom's conduct on this occasion the perfect picture of a democrat—a disloyal, restless, and tumultuous democrat. The course he pursued presents very much the outline of what has been fulfilled in every country where a crafty leader and a credulous crowd have met and coalesced. We see, first, the great ostentation, pomp, and parade of this young man. He believed that people's senses being led captive, their intellects and their attachments might be calculated upon. It was said by a very able man that the Romish Church is constructed upon this principle—that if you can only provide amusement and gratification for the five senses, you may calculate that nine out of every ten people will give up their intellects, their consciences, and their hearts, with their senses. Absalom *certainly had some such idea*; and therefore he dis-

played great splendour, and prepared chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him in costly and shining livery. He rose up early, and appeared before the people with all the pomp and circumstance of royalty; and when he found any one going to get his matters righted in the presence of the king, he met him and said, "See, thy matters are good and right; you need not come to get them settled; it is all right; you have it all your own way; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee." Absalom said, moreover, "Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice:" as much as to say, There is no justice in this land; you have bad laws, you are the subjects of a great tyrant, you have an iron sceptre over you: if you could only see the propriety and the expediency of making me your king instead of that old foolish father of mine, David, then what a happy land would this be; the very desert would blossom like the rose; every man would get justice, every quarrel would be put right. "And in this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel;" by trickery, by treachery, by lies, by pretences that facts would not justify, by promises that he made only to be broken—by these means he stole the hearts of the great body of the men of Israel; and they were prepared therefore to elect him their king, a citizen king; forgetting that if he had been made so, the same passions that put him up would soon have pulled him down. But the thirst for power is so strong in the unsanctified heart, that it will risk the issue for *the transient glory of a temporary sovereignty.* "And

It came to pass after forty years, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the Lord, in Hebron." And David let him go, thinking there was nothing wrong in him. Now Hebron was the place of Absalom's birth; it was also the place where David, his father, was crowned. He thought, therefore, there was a traditional glory resting on the spot, that would make his projects more successful: just as some of the crafty heads of the Sepoy rebels in India recollected that Delhi had the prestige of an ancient sovereignty, there lingering in that city all the remains of palatial greatness; and thought that by rallying their hosts there they would be sure to strike with the greatest effect, and to spread deepest and furthest the impression against our country, and in favour of the miserable creature that they put up, and who was as speedily pulled down from the exercise of a sovereignty to which he had no right. "And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So, he arose, and went to Hebron." And he sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron." This was the mode of sending telegraphic signals in ancient times; the spies were all arranged at certain distances; one sounded the trumpet; the second caught up the sound, and sounded his; the third caught it up, and sounded his; and thus a signal was rapidly conveyed in the various directions which the party giving it desired. Absalom, with great craft, sent for Ahithophel, David's own counsellor, "from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong, for *the people increased continually with Absalom.* And

there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom. And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee." It is naturally asked, How do you explain this strange alteration in the character of David? On former occasions none so brave as he: he was always in the van, his battles were victories; and even when the standard of his country had to retire, his heart never fainted, his courage never faltered; his resources were inexhaustible; he was ready for the fight, and generally sure of the victory. How comes it, then, to pass that no sooner does he hear that this profligate young man had assumed to be king, and that he had got hold even of his own prime-minister, Ahithophel, who was offering sacrifices when he joined the conspiracy (and never are so great crimes done as when they are done under the cloak of religion; and of all men, hypocrites are always ready for the wickedest and the worst of things)—how comes it to pass that when David hears of all this, he at once gives the matter up as desperate and lost; and he and all his servants pass over into the desert? How do we account for all this? Easily enough; cowardice is the product of a conscience wrong with God and man. What was said to David when he had committed his great sin? "I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house." David remembered God's threat; his conscience brought vividly before him his own great sin, by which he had made the enemies of Israel to blaspheme: his courage therefore evaporated, he gave up the cause as desperate, and retreated, a poor, miserable, heart-broken fugitive, into the desert; retaining, however, in his flight the traces of his early

piety, and therefore saying, "If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again to his habitation: but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." You can see the shadow of his sin projected from Jerusalem into the depths of the desert to which he had fled; you can see his heart utterly broken, his courage entirely gone; and the expectation strong within him—for he calls Absalom a king—that he was never to mount his throne, nor to wear his crown again; and that Absalom was now to be king, at least for a season, in Israel.

Then we read that Ittai the Gittite accompanied the king; and when David bade him go, being a Gentile, a pagan, and therefore not necessarily bound to risk his life for David, saying, "Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king," that is, Absalom; "for thou art a stranger, and also an exile." But Ittai the Gittite, with a courage, a friendship, and a loyalty that neither Absalom nor the prime-minister had, said, "As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." Here was a god-like man, a man of true heart. And what does this show? That whilst in Ahithophel, the professed Christian prime-minister, there was entertained a project of conspiracy and insurrection against his royal master; in the heart of this pagan, ignorant of the gospel, there was a heroism, a loyalty, a love, that having not wearied in the best, would not now falter in the worst, of times.

You ask, why did David leave ten women in Jeru-

salem? It is said, that when he quitted his royal palace he left ten women to keep his house. The answer is obvious. It was the custom then to respect women; you scarcely ever hear, in ancient times after the most terrible conflicts, of women being slaughtered or cruelly cut in pieces, as we have read to have recently occurred in India; that barbarism has been reserved for the present age, we trust never to be repeated. David knew his enemies too well to suspect for a moment that they would kill or maltreat the helpless women he had left merely to keep the palace till he, or God's own appointed sovereign, should again take possession of it.

We then read that David prayed that God would turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. When he came to the top of the Mount of Olives, Hushai, the Archite, met him, with his coat rent, and earth upon his head—a symbol of deep distress. And David said, “If thou passést on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me. But if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king; as I have been thy father's servant hitherto, so will I now also be thy servant; then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.” What a craven and cowardly feeling had taken possession of him that slew the giant Goliath, faced him when all fled, and was foremost in the battle, undaunted when all about him despaired! The explanation of it is in the sin that he felt in his conscience, and his deep conviction that God's awful threat was now fulfilling; and that the bitterest cup he might be doomed to drink was not too bitter for the great sin of disloyalty to the King of kings, and disobedience to his holy law.

“Those commonly are most ambitious of authority who least understand its duties. When ambition prompts, the most self-indulgent will appear diligent, the most haughty affable, and pay abject court to the meanest. Such make their way by traducing their superiors; the wisdom and perfection of an angel would be no security against them. By their arts and flatteries they steal the affections of the people, and prepare the way for tumults and rebellions. David determined to quit Jerusalem. He took this resolve as a penitent submitting to the rod. Before unrighteous Absalom he could justify himself, and stand out; but before the righteous God he must condemn himself, and yield submission to his judgments. Thus he accepts the punishment of his sin.

“David is very careful for the safety of the ark. It is right to be more concerned for the church’s prosperity than our own; to prefer the success of the gospel above our own wealth, credit, ease, and safety. Observe with what satisfaction and submission David speaks of the Divine disposal. It is our interest, as well as our duty, cheerfully to acquiesce in the will of God, whatever befalls us. Let us see God’s hand in all events; and that we may not be afraid of what shall be, let us see all events in God’s hand.”

DAVID'S TROUBLES.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WILES OF ZIBA. CURSING SHIMEI. DAVID'S DEPRESSION.
ABSALOM MARCHES ON JERUSALEM. HUSHAI A POLITICIAN
WITH HIS PRICE. AHITHOPHEL'S COUNSEL. PRINCIPLE.

WE find here a sketch of subtlety, wickedness, and falsehood on the part of Ziba, not uncommon in those troubled times in which his lot was cast. David was a refugee and an exile from his throne, his country, and his home. This Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, who was one of Saul's family, met him, and brought a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine. And the king, seeing Ziba coming out to him in the desert, asked him what he meant by them. "And Ziba said, The asses be for the king's household to ride on; and the bread summer fruit for the young men to eat; and the wine, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink. And the king said, Where is thy master's son? And Ziba"—in order to awake a feeling of rivalry in the mind of David, and to conciliate David's good favour for himself, evidently believing that David would yet assert his right to the throne, and be the king and the ruler of Israel—"said

unto the king, Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem ; for he said, To-day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father. Then said the king to Ziba, Behold, thine are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth ;" you shall have the whole property made over to you by my royal grant ; you may go therefore and claim it, as matters are in a disturbed state, and he is not loyal as he should be ; you are quite welcome to his property, and to enjoy it in his stead. Ziba, by this apparent kindness, which was not real kindness, but policy, secured for himself what he wanted : like many men of this generation, who do good turns to others intended to be the means of securing better turns for themselves.

When David came to Bahurim, one Shimei, of the family of Saul, came out and cursed him. Nothing could be more waspish, or wicked, or inveterate than the conduct of Shimei upon this occasion. He was not satisfied with cursing David, he also went along on the hill's side over against him, and threw stones at him, and cast dust. Now one would have thought that when one of David's soldiers offered his services to go and cut off Shimei's head, and stop his cursing, David would have given him permission to do so. But we saw in the previous chapter how completely sunk were David's heart and heroism ; and now, when Shimei cursed him, instead of either silencing him, or making him a prisoner, or otherwise putting an end to conduct so disloyal, disrespectful, and wicked, he said, " What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah ? so let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David." In what sense could God have *commissioned* Shimei to do so ? Shimei cursed David out

of his own heart so far as it was sin ; Shimei cursed David, under God's direction, so far as it was affliction to David. God did not inspire the cursing as far as it was sinful ; God overruled the cursing in order to be chastisement and affliction to David. But you naturally ask, Why should Shimei curse, and why should he be permitted to curse ? The answer is obvious ; he belonged, by office or relationship, to the dynasty of Saul ; he imputed to David what was not true, the displacement of Saul, and the substitution of himself in Saul's stead. Shimei was a person who had lost office, and thereby stipend, and other prospective income and patronage, by the removal of one dynasty and the succession of another. It was not really that he hated David, but that he loved his office. Because David's succession to the throne had been the means of his being turned out of office, and of others reaping the good fruits that he had been accustomed to enjoy, he was angry ; and exasperated and chafed, he bursts forth into the violent, coarse, and disloyal treatment recorded in this passage. He was allowed then to curse on, and no one sought to interfere with him or to do him the least harm.

We then read of Absalom and all the men of Israel coming to Jerusalem, Ahithophel also being with him, of whose treacherous and disloyal conduct to David we read in the previous chapter. Hushai, who was sent by David to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel, came to Absalom, and shouted, " God save the king, God save the king. And Absalom said to Hushai, Is this thy kindness to thy friend ; why wentest thou not with thy friend ? And Hushai said unto Absalom, Nay ; but whom the Lord, and this people, and all the men of

Israel choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide."

Ahithophel gave Absalom advice—alike scandalous and disgraceful—advice that necessarily occasioned a perfect rupture between him and David, and led to results that ended in Absalom's violent death, and in much confusion and trouble to the kingdoms of Israel. "And the counsel of Ahithophel," we are told, "was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and Absalom."

What an evidence have we, in the reading of these chapters, that human nature of itself has undergone very little change since the days of David! We see still unprincipled men, full of selfishness, without one generous thought or magnanimous resolution; men ready to go with the times, and trim and sail according to the breeze that blows; whose chief end, and aim, and object is their own aggrandizement; and whatever contributes to that end is good, whatever most rapidly promotes it is welcome to them; men who have no principle, and what is as bad, who have no heart; who will desert the nearest and the dearest that they have, when the tide seems to turn against them. We admire the man who cherishes attachment, or friendship, or loyalty; and stands unmoved in the worst, and holds by it in the best, of times. One can even admire the Scottish Highlanders in 1745. They were wrong: they believed, however, that the Stuart was the proper dynasty; and at all hazards, and in the face of all sufferings, and at the sacrifice of all that man loves, and the endurance of all man fears, they rallied round the *standard of him they believed to be their lawful king*,

and shed their blood like water for his sake. However mistaken that course was, there was in it that which human nature must still admire. We like to see a man who, even when the cause is a mistaken one, shows consistency, magnanimity, and greatness. Human nature is in some degree redeemed by such traits. But of all execrable exhibitions, the most execrable is that of a man who has no pole-star but that of his own advancement, who has no god but self; and is ready to do anything, and to dare anything, and to sacrifice anybody, if it will gain him a little more per cent. than he could reach by another and an opposite course.

AHITHOPHEL.

CHAPTER XVII.

AHITHOPHEL'S WICKED PROPOSAL. HUSHAI'S COUNTER ADVICE.
ABSALOM TAKES HUSHAI'S ADVICE. THE TWO PRIESTS HIDDEN
IN A WELL. THE END OF AHITHOPHEL.

IN the commencement of this chapter, "Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night; and I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid; and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only. And the saying"—*i. e.*, the seditious and murderous proposal to destroy David, the father of Absalom—"pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel;" so true is it that ambition, when it becomes a frenzy, can blast the strongest and the finest feelings in the human heart. Matters seemed successful up to this moment; but Absalom, though not unwilling for the sake of a throne to sanction the atrocious proposal of Ahithophel, could not, nevertheless, get rid of some misgivings. He had not perfect confidence in Ahithophel; he had known and experienced some of his vacillating courses before; and believing that in the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom, resolved to call in another statesman, and ask his advice—though *in such a case* doubt was crime. This statesman was

Hushai. He was in the confidence of David, and acting for David, and was at this court, if you like to call him so, a spy; not really wishing Absalom's ruin, but desiring anything rather than his success. Hushai, anxious to please Absalom, and keep him from mischief, determined, by using a little flattery, to gain time. He therefore said to him, "The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time;" that is, This is not the crisis when such counsel is likely to succeed. "For," said Hushai, "thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field; and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people. Behold, he is hid now in some pit, or in some other place." Therefore it may be very fine of Ahithophel to propose to go with a few thousand men, and to predict that David will be found off his guard; or that your men will not be seen nor their footsteps heard before David is slain. All this is very pretty, very romantic, extremely calculated to strike you with admiration of the genius of the counsellor who has laid down such a scheme; but you may depend upon it it is a grand mistake; and if you take his advice you will find it so, to your cost. For, in the first place, recollect that David and his men are chafed in their spirits; and their temper will keep them thoroughly awake. In the second place, recollect that David is no coward; that he is no inexperienced strategist or soldier. This is the man that slew Goliath; this is the man who was foremost amidst the foremost few; who led the forlorn hope when all was desperate; and you may depend upon it he is not the man to be so easily overtaken, surprised, and put to death, as

Ahithophel seems to imagine. And you will find that the result of following out Ahithophel's advice will be, that you will hear what will pain and distress you—great slaughter, not among the people that follow David, but among those that follow Absalom. All your hopes will be blasted; your bravest men will catch the contagion of the universal panic—the lion-hearted will flee and fall by thousands; the very name of David is a traditional tower of strength. If your men are informed that they are marching against the renowned hero of Israel, depend upon it they will not be more brave or more decided on that account. "Therefore," he says, "I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude; and," in order to flatter this vain, conceited youth, "that thou go to battle in thine own person. So shall we come upon him in some place where he shall be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground." What a magnificent figure is that! In Palestine and other warm Eastern climates, the dew falls sudden, heavy, and in innumerable drops, saturating the earth, and baptizing every leaf, flower, and petal, on every part of the soil. Now, says he, we will fall upon David and his men countless in number, as the dew falls upon the ground; "and of him and of all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one." And as to his strongholds, why, such will be our overwhelming strength, that "if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone found there." All this, of course, was mere pompous boasting; but it was

just the sort of speech that suited the little mind of vain Absalom. Hushai proved himself the masterly diplomatist and politician in every word that he uttered. He kept Absalom from a desperate experiment, where he might however have succeeded, or where David might have been taken by surprise ; he gave David time to cross the Jordan, to recruit his strength, to refresh his troops that had spent so long a time in the desert ; and thus by stratagem he saved the hopes and the crown of David and of Israel.

Absalom took the advice of Hushai. Then Jonathan and Ahimaaz, the sons of Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, who were friends of David, went to communicate to David what had transpired in the court of Absalom : but one of Absalom's servants detected the nature of their message, and went and told his master. Absalom sent to find them out, thinking there was some treachery in their conduct and appearance. A woman, with that tact and readiness of invention which is the first characteristic of woman, put Zadok and Abiathar into a dry well, spread over it a covering, sprinkled corn upon the covering ; and when Absalom's servants came and saw this spot, they thought it was a bit of ground on which corn was spread that had been a little moistened, in order to dry in the sun, and to be prepared for the mill that was to grind it ; they never suspected the place. The two men, therefore, were sheltered from pursuit, and, as soon as they discover a clear coast, they went and told David all that had taken place.

Ahithophel, a proud and ambitious man, being disappointed in all his schemes, and seeing them blasted before his eyes, went out, and like Judas, after betraying his master, committed suicide, and was buried

sepulchre of his fathers. David, prayed
time before that God would defeat the counsel
ithophel : that prayer finds its fulfilment here.
schemes are brought to nought ; and a plan is
d by David, in consequence of the time he
and the refreshment that he secured for his
that ended in the death of unhappy Absalom,
e destruction of all his hopes in mounting his
s throne. What strange revelations of life in
hest and lowest phases are contained in these
rs !

FATHER AND SON.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DAVID'S MAGNANIMOUS OFFER. THE ARMY KINDLY DECLINE IT. THEY MARCH OUT. DAVID STANDING AT THE GATE. DAVID'S FEELING FOR ABSALOM. ABSALOM'S MELANCHOLY END. TIDINGS FROM THE BATTLE-FIELD. DAVID'S CHIEF THOUGHT. HIS POIGNANT GRIEF.

WE read in the commencement of this chapter that David numbered the people that were with him, divided his army into three divisions, and appointed commanders to each—Joab and Abishai, and Ittai the Gittite. These were the three chief generals or colonels appointed under David to lead his troops, to the grief of David's heart, against his son—his rebel son, who had risen up to slay his father, and to take possession of the throne. When David said—himself a soldier, and a warrior, and a successful one, and covered with the laurels of many victories—"I will go forth with you, and head you myself," (a most inspiring thought, in most incidents of his history,) the people answered, "No; if we flee away there will be no great damage done: if the worst come to the worst, and if half of us die, it will be very sad, but still it will not be utter ruin to our cause. But you are worth ten thousand in many senses and in many respects, because all is contingent upon you; and, therefore, it is better that thou succour us out of the city." David, de-

pressed in mind by his troubles, evidently weaned from all conceit, like a little child, said, "What seemeth you best I will do." But it is very interesting to see that a right cause can often do without the presence of the leader whose cause it is; but a wrong cause never can succeed without a great leader, and even then its success is transient. There is something in loyalty that does not falter in the worst of times, and is strength even in itself. There is something in rebellion, in insubordination, in the consciousness of being in the wrong, that is the nearest possible inspirer of cowardice. An army of a few thousands inspired by a true sentiment, having before it a cause that is right, and behind it the countenance of the good to encourage, is almost sure of victory. A mighty multitude, with a conscience smiting them, and a sense of wrong bowing them down, has the least possible chance of success.

"The king stood by the gate side, and all the people came out by hundreds and by thousands. And the king commanded Joab, and Abishai, and Ittai," what perhaps was pardonable, though not excusable, "Deal gently, for my sake, with the young man, even with Absalom." The parent overbears the ruler. This entreaty, so replete with natural humanity, is worded in a way that indicates what David felt. He does not say, Spare my *son* Absalom, for he had forgotten the relationship of son; he does not say, Spare my *subject* Absalom, for he had trodden under foot the duties of a subject; but spare, what still survives after he has forgotten son and subject, "Spare the *young man* Absalom." It seems the people heard these words. But Joab, and Abishai, and Ittai, the three commanders placed under

him, had no great disposition to listen to what thought extreme humanitarian views suggested, could well conceive, by David's affection for Absalom,

"So the people went out into the field against him, and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim." through the mismanagement of Absalom, who evincing was as bad a soldier as he was a son and subject, people of Israel were slain before the servant David, and there was there a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men. For the battle was scattered over the face of all the country; and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured. And Absalom met the servants of David. And Absalom rode upon a mule," probably looking after his troops, or, perhaps, distracted and in deep thought "and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak," as he was borne along upon the mule, and there he was killed. "and the mule that was under him went away from there he was held fast by the boughs. How I cannot explain; but one can easily conceive the possibility of it, and the fact of it we have no doubt of, because it is asserted here. "Riding furiously under the thick boughs of a great oak, which was low and had never been cropped, either the thick branches or some low forked boughs of the oak caught him by the neck, or, as some think, the loops into which his long hair had been pinned, had been so much his pride and was now justly a halter for him." "And a certain man saw him and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanging from an oak. And Joab said unto the man that told him, And, behold, thou sawest him, and why didst

smite him there to the ground? and I would have thee ten shekels of silver and a girdle. And the man said unto Joab, Though I should receive a hundred shekels of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth my hand against the king's son; for in hearing the king charged thee, and Abishai, and Amasai, saying, Beware that none touch the young man Absalom. Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee;" I will listen to none of that nonsense; Absalom is a rebel, here is a man caught leading rebels against his sovereign; I am a soldier, I will not listen to these suggestions; they are all very natural on Absalom's part, it is very natural for a father to feel so, I cannot defer to these sentiments of a misplaced affection; this is a man who is a rebel, caught with weapons in his hand, and, therefore, by the laws of war he ought to be put to death. "And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the breast of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak." And a pit was dug in the wood, and Absalom's body was cast into it; and a great heap of stones was laid upon it, and all Israel fled. The plan of heaping stones upon the dead was in some cases special, for Absalom, in his vanity and self-love, had raised a pillar in the king's dale in order to be remembered as a tomb or standing monument, I suppose he thought, of his heroism, his loyalty, and his affection to his father; but as he had outraged all three relations he was thrown into a pit in the wood, and a heap of stones laid over him. This was a practice in ancient times, and it prevailed to a late period in the Highlands of Scotland. I have seen a Highlander buried by a heap of stones, called a "cairn," beneath

which a soldier was buried, and show honour to the dead by casting on it the nearest stone, and saying, "I will cast another stone to his cairn," a custom probably imported from the East.

While David was watching to see what would be the issue of the battle, or in all probability to see still more whether his son Absalom would be saved, one came running to him; and the king said to himself, "No doubt by his appearance he brings good tidings." But the first messenger did not state the actual facts of the case. Then Cushie came, and said, "Tidings, my lord the king; for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all that rose up against thee." But the dominant feeling was still in the heart of the father, and he said to him, as he had said before, "Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cushie answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." How significant, how suggestive, and how finely worded, was that communication! And when David heard that his son was slain, he gave expression to the overwhelming grief of his heart, a grief that welled out from the depths of sensitive human nature, which no dignity, no grandeur, no royal robe, no splendid crown, can in such moments conceal or repress, for at heart we are all substantially the same. Merging the dignities of the king in the father, and for a moment the thoughts of his country, his subjects, and the interests of his throne, in his affection to his son, David gave expression to his deep feelings and pure affection, and cried, in language the most touching, and, in another sense, the most eloquent, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom,

„ my son !” One word upon this : what does mean by the expression, “ Would God I had r thee ?” It means, I could have died in order thy life. What, therefore, means the expres- the New Testament, “ Christ died for us ?” rse, interpreted by the language of the people ere familiar with it, it is that Christ died in our n order to save our souls from everlasting death. t a son and such a death must have reminded of the words of Nathan the prophet, “ The sword ever depart from thy house.” Retribution is no ven in this life. In David's as in the Christian's is chastisement, however severe it may be.

INCREASING TROUBLES.

CHAPTER XIX.

JOAB'S REBUKE OF DAVID'S GRIEF. DAVID'S GRIEF AND VACILLATION DISASTROUS IN THEIR EFFECTS. SHIMEI WORSHIPS THE RISING SUN. MEPHIBOSHETH LOYAL IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES. THE OLD MAN BARZILLAI. THE TEN TRIBES AND THE TWO QUARREL.

In the opening part of this chapter we find the account of Joab's conversation, or rather rebuke administered to the king in consequence of his excessive sorrow at the death of his refractory, insubordinate, and undutiful son, Absalom. The previous chapter closed with poignant expressions of grief on the part of the king for the loss of his son Absalom. This chapter tells us that the victory that day was turned into mourning, on account of the great grief of David at the death of his son. How common is such an incident as that in modern times! When we hear of a great victory obtained, and the bells ring, and the voice of congratulation is raised, who is ignorant that all the while there are broken hearts that can reciprocate no sounds of gladness and of congratulation? for those they parted with in hope of their return, they have parted with in this world for ever. The most splendid victories are set in the shadows of bitter griefs, and joyous peals do not drown poignant lamentations. Often and again has it been, and, we fear, often and again

will it be, that the victory is turned into mourning amid all the people. The king, still inconsolable, covered his face, and repeated what he had said before, in language that expressed, by its very reiteration, his deep and acute sorrow, "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Joab, who seems to have been exclusively a soldier, and who could bury every thought of sympathy, or of joy, or of sadness, in the stern sense of duty, approached the king, and in rather an irreverent and disrespectful, but very firm and decided tone, rebuked him for so inordinate and so unseasonable a grief. Very probably there was a little excitement in his spirit, very probably a little temper; but at all events he said what was most true, though he said it roughly. Better take truth and duty in a rough dress than the reverse in all the complimentary phrases of modern courtesy. "Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives." Instead of congratulating us on the victory, instead of thanking us for helping you again to ascend a throne from the desert where you have been skulking, you are really casting shame upon us, and showing apparently to all the people you do not appreciate our services; and this day you are declaring by your conduct that you do not regard either princes or servants; "for," he says, with severe and sarcastic personality—too much so, but still, from David's condition, probably fitted to rouse him out of his morbid grief much more than if he had said smoother things—"for," he says, "this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and we all had died this day, then it had pleased thee well." "Now, therefore," said this rough

soldier, "arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants; for I swear by the Lord, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night; and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now." The king evidently felt keenly what Joab said; but like a right-minded man, humbled by his afflictions, and not disposed to quarrel where a great and solemn obligation was pressing upon him, "he arose and sat in the gate," the place of publicity, the place of judgment too, and also of dignity. "And they told all the people, saying, Behold the king doth sit in the gate. And all the people came before the king; for Israel had fled every man to his tent. And all the people were at strife throughout all the tribes of Israel." The king's delay was beginning to show its disastrous fruits. If the moment the victory was obtained, like a keen strategist, he had rushed into the sphere that then opened up and became him, and seized the throne, and taken the lead of his people, he would have crushed opposition by the very decision of his conduct. But by this delay—by this crying like a child when he ought to have been governing like a monarch and a man—by this vacillating conduct, the tribes began to quarrel among themselves, saying, "The king saved us out of the hand of our enemies, and he delivered us out of the hand of the Philistines; and now he is fled out of the land for Absalom. And Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now, therefore, why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back?" They were evidently beginning now to dispute among themselves, and to discuss whether or not they would not be better with a republic, or with some other king

than with this puling King David, who had not the heart nor the desire to fulfil the duties that became him as the monarch of Israel. "And King David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests," who were his friends, and put into their mouths what they were to address to all the people of Israel. "And say ye to Amasa, Art thou not of my bone, and of my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab. And he bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man; so that they sent this word unto the king, Return thou, and all thy servants." There was a little, if one may use the word, trickery in all this. He wanted to attach to his own cause the tribe of Judah and Benjamin, and for this purpose he was to depose Joab as his prime-minister or commander-in-chief, and to put Amasa in his place. Now this was not right nor proper; for Joab had always acted in a very straightforward, and, though blunt, proper manner. Well, the tribes of Judah were delighted, and sent to the king requesting him to return. "So the king returned, and came to Jordan." It is too often the case that people who will curse you when your sun is setting, the moment they hear that your sun is beginning to rise again in the east will crowd round you and send in adherence, and pronounce blessings upon you. What a strange material is human nature! Here now is this man Shimei, the son of Gera, who, when he saw David retreating into the wilderness, cursed him, and threw stones at him, and indicated a fiendish and wicked spirit, than which nothing could be worse. But now, *when he sees David, not retreating into the desert*

but beginning to ascend the steps of a throne, then he follows him, and falls down at his feet, and blesses him. There are some people that will cleave to advancing greatness, and wealth, and grandeur, be its moral character what it may: they worship the rising sun; and with equal consistency, and for similar reasons, they will curse and fling stones, like Shimei, at setting or departing prosperity. Than all this nothing can be more contemptible; for it is the duty of an honest man, and it will be the delight of a Christian man, to stand by principle and moral excellence in rags, as well as to stand by it in greatness; remembering that it is what the man is that constitutes excellence, not what the man wears, nor what the man has. Shimei now began to bless David. Ziba, another of the same school, a servant of the house of Saul, went over before the king. All the men that ought to have been banished from the land began now to return and to worship him whom before they had spurned and treated with contempt.

Mephibosheth, who was a poor lame son of Saul, had always acted a consistent part. He was not able to help David; he was lame; he had lost all influence and power; but his heart was loyal to him, and beat loyal to him in depression and adversity as much as in prosperity. He explained to David the deceitful conduct of his servant Ziba; and David said, "Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land." I wish to recognise your kindness and your goodness in every way that I can, and wish to have no dispute about such minor details.

An old man, Barzillai, who seems to have occupied

some responsible position in David's court, came down from Rogelim to conduct the king over Jordan. This Barzillai was a very aged man, four score years; "he had provided the king with sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim;" that is, he stood by him in the days of his adversity and trouble; "for he was a very great man," that is, had large possessions. Well, the king said to him, You have done me such great service that I wish to recognise it; if, therefore, you will come to my court you shall be duly promoted in it; or in the language of the chapter, "Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem." Barzillai said, in very beautiful and plaintive terms: "How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? I am this day four score years old; and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat, or what I drink?" These things are losing all their charm now. When one begins to get old, things that once charmed cease to do so; the gilding is worn off all life's toys; the charm has departed from all life's attractions; the eyes become dim, the ears become deaf, the taste becomes deadened. I can hear no more the voice of music; I cannot now taste what is good, either in what I eat or in what I drink; and therefore your offer to me, however kind on your part, is really very little amusement, or reward, or temptation to go into the bustle and the excitements of a court again. "Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother." Throughout the whole of the Old Testament, and in the case of its greatest saints we notice the longing

wish of all to be gathered to their fathers, and to be buried in their own land. This was owing to the strong and universal, though in some degree an undefined conviction of the resurrection from the dead; or the desire that our dust should lie with the dust of generations dear to us when the spirit goes to God that gave it, and the body to the dust as it was. Barzillai, therefore, suggested another person much more suitable to David, and returned to his own place.

And now, at the close of this chapter, we begin to see the chasm that ultimately became impassable between the ten tribes of Israel and the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. On this occasion we have the men of Israel—that is, the ten tribes—coming forward and saying to the king, “Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen thee away, and have brought the king, and his household, and all David’s men with him, over Jordan? And all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, Because the king is near of kin to us; wherefore then be ye angry for this matter?” Why should you lose your temper because we have done our duty? Is it not a very strange thing, when a great and good work is accomplished, the people that were backward, afraid to risk themselves, or afraid of the expense of it, are the first to come forward when it is done, and say, Why did you not give us an opportunity of doing it? whereas the opportunity was given them over and over again; and they waited till the thing was done, and then they became liberal, when their liberality was not required. This was the conduct of the ten tribes. Because Judah had done its duty, restored

the king, and reinstated him on his throne, the men of Israel began to complain that they had not been permitted to do what simply they were afraid, or too timid, or time-serving to make an effort to do. "The men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than ye; why then did ye despise us, that our advice should not be first had in bringing back our king?" Where was their advice given, and what was their advice? "And the words of the men of Judah"—for though a little tribe they had a great deal of spirit; they had real mettle, and could not answer them but in terms in which such cowardly remarks ought to be answered—"were fiercer," and therefore, in these circumstances, more to the purpose and more successful, "than the words of the men of Israel."

It is painful to observe in the history of the church and the world how temper, rather than principle, creates divisions that endure and shed disasters long after the origin of them has passed away. Were there more mutual forbearance, more charitable judgments of men and things, more anxiety to place a kindly interpretation on doubtful things, and a gentle interpretation on errors of judgment, there would be fewer and less frequent quarrels among christian brethren. Unity should never be sought—as, indeed, it cannot be permanently secured—at the price of principle; but it may be secured by the sacrifice of passion, the force of love, the promptings of a high and holy expediency, and the paramount conviction that the glory of God and the good of souls are the great and ultimate ends of christian life.

The sins, and sorrows, and strifes, and personal controversies exhibited in these sacred histories are reproduced in our age, and church, and country. Inspiration is impartial where human history fails, or is diverted from truth by disturbing influences. The Scripture, as a mirror, reflects humanity everywhere, and in every age. May we by grace shun the evil, and day by day exceed the good which stained or adorned David and his generation.

FRESH TRIALS.

CHAPTER XX.

DAVID IS AGAIN ASSAILED. SHEBA BLOWS THE TRUMPET OF SEDITION. DAVID'S COURSE. AMASA APPOINTED COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. JOAB'S TREACHERY. THE WISE WOMAN OF ABEL. SHEBA IS SLAIN.

NATHAN told David, after his great and scandalous sin, that the sword should not depart from his house. It cannot have escaped your notice how strictly and literally this most awful prophecy was fulfilled in the biography of that great, and, on the whole, good, but frequently misguided, king of Israel. It appears on this occasion that no sooner had he quelled the most painful insubordination and revolt of Absalom than another person, Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite, blew the trumpet of sedition, and summoned the ten tribes of Israel to war against King David. We may see in this what a vacillating thing is mere public opinion, where it is not based upon a deep moral sentiment. At the close of the last chapter, when the men of Israel discovered that the men of Judah had brought back the king, they complained that they were not allowed a share in their sovereign, and thereby a portion of the laurels of this great triumph; whereas the truth was, they did not stir themselves when they were wanted; and they *were now only* sorry to see that others had gained

the prize which they were, they thought, too prudent in the circumstances in which they were placed to attempt to gain. Sheba, the son of Bichri, evidently saw that the ten tribes were in a very dissatisfied state—that there was a sort of mutinous spirit amongst them, that might, by a skilful leader, be fanned into a successful revolt against David and his dynasty. He therefore blew a trumpet, gave notice, and said, “We have no part in David.” What had they said in the previous chapter? “We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than ye;” but here, when it suited their purpose, it is to be observed they said, “We have no part in David;” it is quite plain we owe him no allegiance; he can do well enough without us, and we can do very well without him; therefore let us rise up against his dynasty and throne: “Every man to his tents, O Israel! So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba, the son of Bichri.” What a strange thing that they should have acted thus; that, owing allegiance to their king—an allegiance not more expedient as a national thing than dutiful as a religious obligation—well knowing that he was their lawful and undoubted king, they should for one moment listen to a rude, violent, self-seeking democrat, who had nothing in view but his own aggrandizement, and who cared only at any price to gratify his mad ambition. David, we read, came to his house at Jerusalem; and said to Amasa, “Assemble me the men of Judah within three days, and be thou here present.” It is worthy of notice that David in many of his arrangements was left to himself. On a previous occasion, Joab, who was a first-rate soldier, and was the com-

mander-in-chief of all his forces, put Absalom to death. David was so displeased at this, that he deprived Joab of his command, and appointed Amasa in his stead. Accordingly, when another revolt takes place he does not send for Joab,—the monarch letting the father occupy a place in the government of the realm, which he ought never to have suffered, and forgetting royal duties in paternal sympathy and love—but for Amasa; and orders him to assemble the men of Judah within three days. Amasa did not return at the appointed time. David then turned round to Abishai, and said, “Now shall Sheba, the son of Bichri, do us more harm than did Absalom; take thou thy lord’s servants, and pursue after him, lest he get him fenced cities, and escape us.” Accordingly, all the men that Joab used to lead to battle, and almost invariably to victory, followed Abishai, but evidently not very much attached either to him or to Amasa—at least, not so much as to Joab. And when they came to Gibeon, Amasa went before them. Joab, finding his place as commander-in-chief occupied by another, that is, by Amasa, who had taken part in Absalom’s rebellion, and therefore not worthy, as he thought, to step into his shoes—went after him, and by an act of gross treachery and inhuman cruelty, he professed to kiss him—according to the Eastern form—and immediately plunged his sword in his bosom; and Amasa fell. The soldiers that followed Amasa, seeing his dead body upon the road, appear to have been staggered. They did not know whether they should rise up and put to death Joab, or what they should do. They evidently wavered, and stood still. But a crafty tactician took the body, laid it aside from the road,

and covered it up out of sight; then the rest of the soldiers passed on, seeing nothing, and not knowing that anything was wrong. Immediately, Joab, without a single word, took Amasa's place, and led the soldiers on to the victory.

We then read that they came to a city, called Abel; "and they cast up a bank against the city, and it stood in the trench; and all the people that were with Joab battered the wall, to throw it down." They evidently did not meet with success. Here turns up a woman,—a woman of extraordinary understanding, for it must not be assumed that, intellectually, woman is in the least inferior to man. It seems to be a favourite argument with some, that woman's intellect is not equal to man's. The proper answer is, woman's mind is not of the same fibre, nor of the same structure; it is superior to man's in its own orbit, it is inferior to man's in the orbit in which his moves; and therefore the comparison is not fair: they are different intellects, suited for different objects; often we find that in instances where man fails, woman triumphs. Here is an instance of it. This wise woman came and stood on the wall, and cried out, "Hear, hear; say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither, that I may speak with thee." And he had the good sense to listen. She said, "They were wont to speak in old time, saying, They shall surely ask counsel at Abel;"—(the city was celebrated for its wisdom, its skill, and its understanding; and they used to ask counsel of its people in emergencies and great difficulties;)"—"and so," says the woman, "they ended the matter." Now, says she, "I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel;" I am

loyal to David; I do not wish that this city should be destroyed; and therefore, if you will tell me what it is that you want, you may prevent the destruction of a city that is like a "mother in Israel;" and you will also be saved from swallowing up "the inheritance of the Lord." Joab said, I have not the remotest intention or design to injure the city; but Sheba, a rebel leading troops against my royal master, David, has found a lodgment, and, as far as I can discover, protection and shelter within your walls. Now, as a soldier, my duty is to take him dead or alive; if I cannot catch him outside, and if I cannot get in, I must batter down the walls till a breach is made, and then my soldiers will rush in and make very short work of all that resist their entrance. The woman therefore went to her people—told them these very plain facts; and the people, with great good sense and with much propriety, cut off the rebellious Sheba's head, and cast it out to Joab. "And he blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city, every man to his tent." Now, one is often pained to read such instances of murder, and apparently unnecessary bloodshed; but, again, I ask you to recollect, you are reading here, not a profile view of human nature, such as the novel and the poem sometimes give you, but the faithful history of facts as they occurred, and of human nature in all its phases; and you must not complain of the Bible because it reflects what is needed, truly and faithfully the full portrait of poor human nature, as it is found in kings, in soldiers, in subjects, and under all the varying circumstances in which it plays so momentous and often so painful a part.

God accomplishes his purposes in ways strange, and

sometimes inexplicable. He sanctions no sin, but often he turns the sins of the wicked into reluctant contributions to the accomplishment of his purposes.

“One trial arises after another for our good, till we reach the place where sin and sorrow are for ever done away. The favour of the many is not to be depended upon; and what have others to expect when ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ was soon changed to ‘Crucify him, crucify him?’ Joab barbarously murdered Amasa, and soon Joab smarteth for a loyal disobedience. How slippery are earthly honours, and subject to continual changes! Happy are they who are in favour with Him in whom there is no shadow of change! The single condition of peace is, to the city of Abel, the surrender of the traitor. It is so in God’s dealing with the soul, when besieged by conviction and distress; sin is the traitor, the beloved lust is the rebel: part with that, cast away the transgression, and all shall be well. There is no peace on any other terms.

“To kiss the beard is a common mode of salutation in the East, but it is a great affront in any other case to touch it.—The place called Abel had probably been noted for the wisdom of its people; hence a common proverb had its origin.—*A mother*; a city that is of note.—*Over the tribute*; collector of the taxes.—*Recorder*; keeper of the records.—*Scribe*; secretary.”

TROUBLES AND CONFLICTS.

CHAPTER XXI.

FAMINE. SIN AND ITS RETRIBUTION. DAVID'S APPEAL TO THE GIBEONITES. THE SEVERE PUNISHMENT. RIZPAH AND HER SONS. DAVID COMBATS A PHILISTINE. A GIANT.

WE approach in this chapter the last incidents in the biography of David—a biography not the least memorable of all the lives of the illustrious, and good, and great of Israel. It appears from this chapter that there was a famine in the days of David; the sword in his house and famine in the land being the judgments that had fallen upon him because of his great and grievous transgressions against God. In the midst of this famine David, no doubt, had recourse to all that could either mitigate or remove it—for common sense will always avail itself of instruments that are lawful to stave off perils that are imminent—yet he looked higher than human instrumentality; and in the language of the text, “inquired of the Lord;” that is, sought God’s direction by prayer, and the removal of the famine, if expedient, by interceding for his people. And God answered, “This famine is a judgment; it is for Saul and his murderous house, because he slew the Gibeonites.” Is it not remarkable that forty years after the sin, famine, the judgment, should descend upon the land of Israel?

and yet with God forty years or four thousand years are but as one day. And that may teach us a very remarkable and striking lesson,—retribution always follows national sin, in some shape, sooner or later. It is a most perilous and daring thing to name the specific sin that brings down the specific judgment; but there can be no doubt that sin and judgment follow each other, inseparably, and the connexion is sure to be eventually seen and felt. David did not dare himself to say, This famine is come upon the nation because of some specific sin; he pondered and sought God's direction. We must have noticed in some of the sermons preached on a recent Day of Humiliation how very ready some individuals were to specify the precise sin that had brought down the awful judgments or tribulations that lighted upon India. I should be extremely sorry to specify unless I were inspired of God. That sin has preceded and is the source and cause of some of these judgments, there is no doubt; but it is a very difficult and delicate thing to lay the finger infallibly upon the special sin. It is much better to feel that sin is at the root of it, to repent of all sin, to correct all that is wrong, to humble ourselves before God, and to be slow to specify where God has not inspired our minds to do so. David did not venture to name the sin; but some now-a-days seem to claim inspiration when, with a dogmatism and a decision that seem unwarrantable, they say, There is the sin, and this is the punishment; while they find the sin in places where their own feelings lead them to seek it, and pronounce where they should only humble themselves, repent, and pray. Of this, however, we may be

assured, that where there is suffering there must have been sin; and in the case of public or national suffering, there must have been previously, somewhere or in some shape, specific national sin; but it needs the God that inflicts the punishment to assure us of the sin that provokes it; and where he does not inspire we should be very slow to pronounce. At all events, we must never think that the greatest sufferers are the greatest sinners. It is all very well for those that are exempt from the sufferings coolly to sit upon the judgment-seat and pronounce; but it is better to follow our Blessed Lord, who said, "Think ye that these eighteen, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, were sinners above all men? I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." It is more like the spirit of the Blessed Master to say, Think ye that India, on whom these terrible calamities have come, is sinful above all nations? I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise suffer.

The king, when taught by God what was the cause of the special judgment, said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the Lord? And the Gibeonites said unto him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house; neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel. And he said, What ye shall say, that will I do for you. And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord did

choose. And the king said, I will give them." This seems to have been a very violent procedure; and it has been a question, Did God sanction this? There is no record that he did; and yet it seems the natural inference, as the famine was afterwards removed. What a solemn lesson, that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, when we read that the personally innocent sons of Saul were punished with death because of a great sin on the part of their unhappy and misguided parent!

Then we read that Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, when her two sons were thus slain violently by the Gibeonites, sat beside their dead bodies upon the rock with all the intensity of a mother's affection; and from the beginning of the harvest she waited till rain came from heaven, which was the end of the famine, in order that they might have what we call a Christian burial; or their dust might mingle with the dust of their fathers. She sat there night and day, praying to God that it might please him to send down the showers of heaven, and put an end to the harvest; that if she could not put life into her dead children she might at least lay them quietly and peaceably in the grave. We then read of the honourable burial of the family of Saul. And after that God was entreated for the land.

We come to the last battles in which David seems to have been involved, previous to his singing that sublime song which is in the next chapter. In these battles he met with those who seem to have been the descendants or the relatives of Goliath, whom he slew in battle. One appears to have mastered him; but Abishai succoured him, and killed the Philistine.

When David's subjects, thinking that the light of Israel might be quenched by a random blow, entreated that he would not expose himself any more. And, lastly, we have a giant described, who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. This seems an extraordinary thing; but many have read of similar instances having occurred in very recent times. And when this giant defied Israel, Jonathan, the son of Achish, the brother of David, slew him. And all these giants fell either by the hand of David or by the hands of his servants.

SONG OF THANKSGIVING.

CHAPTER XXII.

THIS truly sublime song of thanksgiving can only be understood by recollecting the various scenes of historic public and private character through which David and his kingdom passed, as these have been recorded in the previous chapters of this book. It is at the close of all these scenes that David bursts forth into this song; and gives the praise, and the glory, and the honour of all he did to Him who inspired and strengthened him to triumph; and takes to himself the lowly place of deserving nothing, and by grace having received all. He begins this song, which is very nearly the same as the 18th Psalm, also composed by David, by describing God's relationship to him, and his relationship to God. He says, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; the God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge;" each of these symbols pregnant with a distinct idea, but each having its special excellency in David's case, as it may have all its virtue in our case, by that single monosyllable *my*. Anybody can say, God is a rock, a shield, a tower, a Saviour; the Christian alone, who believes in him, trusts in him, can say, He is *my* rock, *my* tower, *my* refuge, and *my* Saviour.

David resolves, "I will call on the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from mine enemies." After the 4th verse he gives an account of what he has passed through. He says, "The waves of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; the very sorrows of the grave, or of hell, compassed me about; the snares of death prevented"—that is preceded—"me." After this picture of desolation, danger, and distress—dark, and yet not exaggerated—he states his experience. "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God." No doubt he used the means that God's Providence had given him; when surrounded with enemies he called out his soldiers, and directed them, and had recourse to skilful leaders—all this he did; and when God saves by means he is often seen to be more magnificently God than when he saves without means. It requires Deity as much to produce a vast result by very inadequate means, as to produce a good or beneficial result without means at all. But whatever were the means, David says, I gave God, as I give him now, all the praise; for I called to him: and he states his experience—which is the experience of all Christians, in all ages, and in all countries, "I cried, and he did hear my voice out of his temple." I think every one must be struck, on reading God's word, with this,—that there is no such thing as an instance of earnest prayer breathed from the heart for a great blessing, that remained unanswered. It was not a long prayer, nor an eloquent prayer, but it was an earnest prayer, leaping from the heart, and not pausing till God heard it, and sent down an answer from heaven, his holy place. If *men are not Christians*, it is because they do not want

to be so ; if men are not blessed, it is because they do not ask ; and sometimes when they do ask and do not receive an answer, it is because they ask from a wrong motive, and for a vicious end, and not from a pure motive, and for their own present and eternal happiness. When David called upon God, God came forth to deliver him. Then he describes the steps of God coming to deliver him. He says, "The earth shook, the foundations of heaven moved ; there went up smoke from his nostrils ; he bowed the heavens, and came down ; he rode upon a cherub, and did fly ;"—imagery the most expressive and magnificent. Deity, of course, is clothed in human apparel. Sometimes people object to this peculiar imagery, as if it were lowering Deity, when it says, "The Lord thundered from heaven ; he sent out arrows, and scattered them ; lightning, and discomfited them ; the channels of the sea appeared." But you must recollect that we cannot conceive of Deity in the abstract ; we can only conceive of God in what is called the concrete ; that is, under some similitude of human kind. The thirst of all nations has been to get a sight of God ; that sight of God was vouchsafed in Christ ; and we have the likeness of Christ in the New Testament. Now the Jews so thirsted for a sight of God—a sight that was given once to Moses from the rock, when his glory passed by—that they made an image of him, and broke his holy law. The Greek thirsted for God, and with his fine æsthetic and cultivated taste he wrought the marble into all forms of material beauty, hoping that some one might be beautiful enough to embody and represent God. The Hindoo has images according to his taste, revolting and horrible, but such as he thinks

represent God. The explanation of all idolatry and polytheism is, man striving to get a sight of God, to hear him, and to know that he has God with him. And throughout the whole Old Testament, God meets this thirst, and gives us foreshadows and outlines of that perfect manifestation of God—Christ Jesus. What is the Old Testament? The footprints of God upon the sands of time, coming to the manger of Bethlehem and the Cross on Calvary, each footprint becoming more marked and clearly defined as the hour of his manifestation draws nigh. Hence wherever God is spoken of in the Old Testament, it is under human imagery; and here, therefore, we read, “he rode upon a cherub.” A warrior, a soldier on horseback, a beautiful rider, strong, fearless, and armed, is an image extremely expressive and impressive; the Psalmist, therefore, takes the most powerful and majestic fact in our own experience, and makes that a symbolic representation of God.

The expression, “The channels of the sea appeared;” —the ocean agitated and convulsed; its waves rising so high that its very channels were laid bare, in consequence of the breath of God,—his anger when he came down to judge the nations. Then he describes the result of this interposition: “He delivered me from my strong enemy; he brought me forth also into a large place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me.”

Lastly he says, “I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God.” If David meant to say that of his own personal career, it was untrue; for he had sinned, and his whole life, to the day of his death, subsequent to his great sin, was,

what the prophet Nathan told him the history of—the sword in his house. But it is evident that David speaks here as ruler of Israel. Now I can conceive a king being personally a bad man, and yet as a ruler—apart from his personal influence, which I admit, in such a case, is always powerful in this world—he may be most just, and righteous, and powerful, and successful, the reasons of his being so lying outside of his personal character. David here is speaking of himself as the king of Israel; and certainly, in that capacity, no man wielded a sceptre with purer justice, greater moderation, or in a way more calculated to promote prosperity, and peace, and order throughout the whole land of Israel.

He says, “God is my strength and power; and he maketh my way perfect.” And what a beautiful expression is that: “Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation; and thy gentleness hath made me great!” And now what will be the result of all this? “Strangers”—that is, the heathen,—“shall submit themselves;” strangers that refuse to submit shall fade away. And then he closes the hymn with descriptions of praise and thanksgiving to his rock, and his strength, and his tower of salvation, and his deliverer.

LAST WORDS.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LAST WORDS OF DAVID. DAVID'S EXPERIENCE. HIS CONFIDENCE IN THE PROMISES. THE CONDITION OF SINNERS. A CATALOGUE OF WARRIORS.

WE approach the close of David's most chequered yet brilliant life. It has no parallel recorded in the biography of the people of God. We are here told that these were the last words of David—not the last that he spoke, for he spoke afterwards; but the last that were embodied, by the inspiration of God, in the shape of a permanent hymn of praise or psalm of thanksgiving. It begins by recording what Jesse was. A trait comes out in the record extremely beautiful. David had risen to a throne; but he was not ashamed to own the rock from which he was hewn, and the hole of the pit from which he was digged; for he begins with—“David the son of Jesse;” and commemorates the fact, not only without shame, but with gratitude and praise that, though the son of a shepherd, and reared as a shepherd-boy, he had been made the sovereign of a mighty people, and the conqueror of all the enemies of that people round about. “David, the son of Jesse, the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel.” How worthy he is of that name few that read the

Psalms can fail to see. Luther said, "The Psalms constitute a little Bible." In the earliest ages of the Christian church Augustine writes that the herdsmen amid their flocks, the seedsmen in spring, and the reapers in the harvest, sang constantly the Psalms of David—Psalms not of an age, or for an age, but replete with grand truths for all times and for all the varied phases of human experience—joy and grief. And when one thinks of the history of these Psalms—sung by the banks of the Euphrates, and in the cave of Adullam, or in the palaces of Israel, or resounding in its magnificent temple, the last strains ceasing with its last glory; sung by our Blessed Lord at the first communion table that was ever spread, for he sang a Psalm at it; used by the persecuted Christians under Nero and Domitian—the burden and the expression of the griefs of them whose names are inscribed below the very surface of the soil of Rome; lifted up to heaven by the persecuted Protestants on the Cottian Alps, and in the caves and dens of western and of eastern Europe; sung by the Reformers, Martin Luther ever finding in the 46th Psalm the consolation that he needed when his enemies were most powerful and most formidably besetting him,—and since that day, of what griefs and joys, of what pains and aches, and hopes and expectancies, have these divine Psalms been felt and used to be the meet and expressive vehicles,—truly he was worthy of the name of "the sweet psalmist of Israel."

He then states the inspiration of what he says: "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me." "Holy men of old," says the New Testament writer, "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." And in the

Acts of the Apostles we read that David spoke this moved by the "Holy Spirit;" and, therefore, we are satisfied that whatever David penned is the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. He speaks of God as "the God of Israel," the covenant God of Israel; "the Rock of Israel," its Rock on which it leans, under the shadow of which it finds shelter from a burning sun; in the clefts of which are living waters; in the possession of which is a shelter and a tower of defence. "He that ruleth over men must be just;" there is the chief, first attribute of sovereignty, just—"ruling in the fear of God." Nothing is so powerful an inspiration of duty in sovereign and subject as the fear of God. When we for one moment think of this fear of God, that is, the sense of his presence, "Thou seest me"—the sense of responsibility to him, and of the obligation of his law, and the certainty that we must appear at his judgment-seat—we feel what constraining and powerful motives these must be! There is no one element more constraining or sanctifying than living religion; and if kings, and rulers, and subjects, and ministers, and people, would only feel wherever they are that there is an eye upon them that no clouds can intercept the gaze of, that no secrecy can escape, that no nook in the height or depth is not explored by; in other words, if we could only have the Spirit of God to write upon our hearts the 139th Psalm—"If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me"—what a guarantee for the practice and pursuit of whatsoever

things are pure, and just, and lovely, and honest, and of good report! Then he predicts what shall be the prosperity of such a one: "He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds." What a fine figure is here! it is full of poetic beauty; his progress shall be like the sun. What is the progress of the sun? Go forth into the fields on a summer morning at sunrise; your first impression would be that the sun is struggling with clouds and darkness; and that it is a question, doubtful and difficult, if you had no experience, to determine whether he or the clouds and the darkness shall gain the ascendancy. But soon you notice that the very clouds that obstructed his march he dissolves into dews which fall upon the thirsty flowers, and refresh them as with a morning bath; and that the very things that seemed to arrest his progress he turns into elements to help him; he makes the clouds like banks of rubies, the dewdrops like mirrors to reflect his glory; and lake, and river, and ocean become one bright and luminous surface, adding to the intensity of that splendour which in vain some of them attempted to arrest. So shall it be with a king who rules in the fear of God; he shall be like the light of the morning; it shall increase more and more unto the perfect day; and though there may be a cloud here and there, he will dissolve it, and opposition will become impulse; his enemies shall lick the dust, and friends shall gather round him; and that nation shall be exalted which is a righteous nation, ruled by a just and a God-fearing sovereign.

David then says, "Although my house be not so with God," as I could wish it; "yet he hath made with me

an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure."

Next he gives the names of those who had assisted him in his march from the sheep-folds of his father Jesse to the sovereignty of Israel. This is a very beautiful trait. We should never forget or despise the steps of the ladder by which we have risen to eminence in any sphere or department of life. But how apt is man, and how wicked is it, to kick away the ladder by which he has risen to greatness! But we have, in David's case, the evidence that he was not ashamed to say that he did not do all; that while God had the glory of all, many great men, numbered with the dead and gathered to their fathers, had helped him to his successes and his triumphs. It is worth noticing that there is commemorated here valour or heroism in battle. Bravery in a soldier is a virtue; and where we see it we should revere it, and thank God for it; and our nation's annalists only take the Bible as their precedent when they record the heroism, and the struggles, and the victories of its brave men, and its great men, and its good men. He then mentions the various victories that these men gained; but he takes care also to add that it was the Lord that wrought the great victory, and that to Him pertains all the glory.

Thus, in a chapter apparently dry, and full of uninteresting and historic details, there are latent truths, most precious, presenting to us precedents that we ought not to forget; and bequeathing to our historians, too, a principle to guide them when they write the annals of nations less chequered in their history, less *varied in their experience*, than was the kingdom of

Israel. There are no barren fields in Scripture. If there be no bright flowers above, there is sleeping untouched below many a golden mine. All Scripture is profitable—some parts to individuals, other parts to nations, and other parts may be full of uses which our blindness fails to detect. Our first prayer should be, "Open mine eyes, O Lord, that I may see wondrous things out of thy law."

SATAN'S SUCCESS.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SATAN MOVES DAVID TO SIN. A JUDICIOUS ADVISER. MOTIVES DETERMINE THE NATURE OF ACTS. NEED OF SHADOW. THREE GREAT JUDGMENTS. DAVID SELECTS PESTILENCE. THE ALTAR OF SACRIFICE.

It seems a startling statement in the opening part of this chapter, "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." It seems to me abundantly apparent that *he* who moved David was not God; as appears also in the margin, which generally contains a correct rendering,—and compared with Chronicles we are sure that it was Satan who moved David to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah." The "he moved," therefore, is not a reference to God, but a reference to the wicked one. Suppose *he* referred to God, it could be explained satisfactorily, just in the same way in which we explain; "God hardened the heart of Pharaoh, so that he would not let the people go." God *permits* things to be done which he does not *commission*; or so withdraws his protecting and preserving providence that men are "led into temptation," not "delivered from evil," and become therefore the victims and the sport of their own depraved *passions*; or of him, who, like a roaring lion, goeth

about seeking whom he may devour. But in every instance we are sure of this—that God is not the author of sin. “No man is tempted of God to sin; neither doth God tempt any man,” says the inspired penman. And we are perfectly sure that this cannot be the case, had we no other reason than that it would not be sin; if God created sin, then it would be one of his own creatures; and if God impelled any one to sin, then there would not be any kind of personal or moral responsibility. You cannot conceive God punishing what he inspires, or leading his creatures to seek forgiveness for what he himself is the author of. But we are quite certain it was Satan that moved David against them to say, “Go, number Israel and Judah.” The commander-in-chief of David’s army, who acted mainly also as his counsellor and prime-minister, approached the king with all deference, and immense good sense, and great tact and delicacy, and introduced what he had to say, which, in itself, was calculated to cross the king’s impetuous temper, “Now the Lord thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold;” it was a complimentary wish, and a very proper prefatory remark to what he was going to say; “but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?” why are you so bent upon numbering the people? Was it a sin? It seems at first sight a very strange thing to punish a monarch for numbering his people. How natural to wish to know how many they were, what they were able to do, what hopes of success against a foe, or of holding out against an invasion,—all this seems so natural. Moses numbered the people, and it was no sin. Why was *it a sin* in David? It is not always the outward act,

but the motive that determines the nature of the thing.

There is no doubt that David, now that matters were becoming prosperous, and the noonday sun was shining, and the success seemed sure, and everything appeared to go just as he could wish, began to forget himself. He was humble, cautious, obedient, when he was hunted like a partridge on the mountains, or visited for his sin; but now that things became prosperous and quiet, his watchfulness flagged, or rather he ceased to exercise a sufficient inspection over those appetites, desires, and passions which are never annihilated in the flesh or in this world, and therefore need always and everywhere to be repressed and kept under. How thankful should many people be that they are not always in sunshine! None of us can stand perpetual sunshine; it is too bright; we need shadow and cloud, in order to keep us where we should be. And those incidental shocks that come to our commerce—those convulsions that agitate the earth and paralyse a nation's energy—are all, no doubt, very hard to be borne by those that feel the brunt of them; but these dark clouds have blessings in their bosoms; and if you wait awhile, the moral and the spiritual good that they leave will more than compensate for the temporal trials which they have inflicted upon many. When David began thus to forget himself, one of his first projects arising out of ambition, pride, vain-glory, and probably preliminary to his feeling that he did not want God's blessing or God's aid in the presence of an army heroic enough to repel any foe, and troops valiant enough to secure any victory—was to estimate the *strength* of the nation; and therefore he com-

missioned Joab to go and number the people. It is clear, therefore, that the motive that lay at the root of this act made it most sinful. David was a king, in a high place, amid great light, the subject of universal inspection; and therefore what he did was likely to be far more disastrous and ruinous in its effects than what an individual did—a lesson to those that tread the highest, and because the highest the most slippery places of the land, to walk circumspectly, knowing that they are the observed of all observers. God resolved, therefore, to punish David for this great sin—sin not in its literal outward expression, but in its inward roots and motives. David had no sooner accomplished his task than he came to himself: “And he said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done; and now, I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.” “Take away;” it is a word that means take away by atonement. For instance, in the verse, “Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world:” the verb involves and implies the idea of sacrifice. Take away, by atonement or sacrifice, my sins. On the scape-goat, the priest, as the representative of all Israel, laid his hands, confessed the sins of all the people over it, and then dismissed the scape-goat into the desert; and the idea was that the scape-goat lifted away all the sins of the people, and they were forgiven. David says, Lift away my sins, as the scape-goat lifts away all the sins of thy people Israel.

“And when David was up in the morning, the word of the Lord came unto the prophet Gad, David’s seer,” and gave him a commission to address to David.

Though God was ready to forgive the sin, yet a public offence, perpetrated in the face of all Israel, needed a public manifestation of God's righteous judgments. And Gad came to David, and said what, so far, was in mercy: God offers you three great retributions; either take famine, or take defeat and flight before your enemies, or take pestilence. David suggested the one that implied least selfishness on his own part. If he had taken famine he might have defied its inroad into his palace, or mitigated its effect on himself, by having stores that the multitude had not; if he had taken defeat he might have been sheltered as the king, and only his officers and his men would have fallen; but by selecting pestilence he showed the unselfish character of his heart. He selected that mysterious visitation that reaches both palace and hut, and transmits its miasma into all heights, and depths, and levels, and circumstances. And accordingly God sent the pestilence. Here is a very striking lesson; God sends pestilence as a chastisement to some, as a punishment to others. It is correct enough to look at secondary causes; it is only wrong to stop there. When men say that the cause of pestilence is bad air, bad water, bad food, and that these things should be remedied—they state what is perfectly true; but when they stop there, and say that is all, they are guilty of omitting the great fact, that nothing happens that God does not permit or send.

We read that even in the midst of this pestilence God heard the prayers of David and his people, and stayed the pestilence; and said to the angel, "It is enough; stay now thine hand." Then the prophet Gad came to David, and said to him, "Go up, rest on

altar unto the Lord in the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite." This was the very place where Isaac was led to be sacrificed, and where the angel interposed, and said, "The Lord will provide." This was the very hill of Moriah, on which the cross was raised, and Christ died a sacrifice and an atonement for our sins. And when Araunah, with great liberality, offered it for nothing, David said, No; I will not offer to God that which costs me nothing. When we hear of a princely donation of one thousand pounds to some good object by some great one, it has cost him very little—it is not so much sacrifice as a few pence by a poor widow. The greatness of the gift is not the largeness of the sum as it sounds in human ears; but it is the sacrifice in the heart from which that sum has come. We should never offer to God that which costs us nothing. Many a man flings a sovereign, or five, or a thousand, to some good object; and we are thankful for it, because it does good; but it is, in his case, merely a superfluity: it costs him nothing; he never denied himself a single gratification in order to give it. But there are people in this world of ours—like flowers in the desert, like bright streaks of sunshine on a dark and gloomy day—people whose names are not sounded by the trumpet of fame, nor heard of in advertisements in the papers, who give, or suffer, or sacrifice, and are silent.

"The pride of David's heart was his sin in numbering of the people. He thought thereby to appear the more formidable, trusting in an arm of flesh more than he should have done, and though he had written so much of trusting in God only. God judges not of sin as we do. What appears to us harmless, or, at least,

but a small offence, may be a great sin in the eye of God, who discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart. What we make the matter of our pride, it is just in God to take from us, or make bitter to us, and make it our punishment. This must be such a punishment as the people have a large share in; for though it was David's sin that opened the sluice, the sins of the people all contributed to the flood. In this difficulty David chose a judgment, which came immediately from God, whose mercies he knew to be very great, rather than from men, who would have triumphed in the miseries of Israel, and have been thereby hardened in their idolatry.

“In the very place where Abraham was stayed from slaying his son, this angel, by a like countermand, was stayed from destroying Jerusalem. It is for the sake of the great Sacrifice that our forfeited lives are preserved from the destroying angel. See the building of the altar, and the offering proper sacrifices upon it. Burnt-offerings to the glory of God's justice; peace-offerings to the glory of his mercy. Christ is our Altar, our Sacrifice; in him alone we may expect to escape his wrath, and to find favour with God.

“*He moved*; David was moved: it was by Satan; see 1 Chron. xxi. 1. The enumeration differs from that in 1 Chron. xxi. by an error of transcription, or by one account including some omitted by the other.

“*Smote him*; David was awakened to perceive he had done wrong by the message of the prophet Gad; see ver. 11. It seems probable that his offence in thus numbering the people was, that it proceeded from

ambition and pride, or, that numbering the people was unlawful without the Divine command.

“*Seven years of famine* ; three are stated, 1 Chron. xxi. ; perhaps those sent for Saul’s sin (chap. xxi. 1) are here included.

“*Repented him* ; did not fully execute the sentence of evil.”

CONCLUSION.

IN these two books—of which the next two, namely, first and second Kings, are the historical completion—we learn not a little of man in all the lights and shadows of his fitful life. The strange mixture of piety and meekness and resignation with connivance at evil in his sons, which it was his duty as a priest and father to correct; and the consequences that followed—ruin to them, and a broken heart and bitter sorrow to himself,—read to us all a very solemn and a very practical lesson. We find a no less instructive lesson in national life. The Israelites grew weary of the government of God even under the presidency of so good a man as Samuel. They began also to admire and envy the surrounding nations—their imperial pomp and circumstance, and glory. Under these feelings they resolved—in spite of warnings of what would be the issue—to have a throne, a king, a court, and all the equipage and circumstance of royalty. They preferred a monarchy—the best it may be of human institutions—to a theocracy, which alone is perfect. Their prayer was granted, not in mercy, but in judgment. They obtained leave to carry out their own views, and taste the excellence or evil of their adopted principles. Their disasters at Gilboa and Gilgal must have opened their eyes to the infatuation of steps it was too late to retrace.

We receive also a lesson from a throne. Saul's sin at Gilgal was the first diverging step toward an apostasy which ended in his melancholy death. The adoption of a wrong principle—especially in situations of power and influence—is the beginning of a series of wrong practices, the ultimate extent of which seems incredible.

Contrasting with all this is the character of Samuel—faithful, spiritually-minded, affectionate, rising above envy and jealousy, tender-hearted in an eminent degree, pitying deeply where he could not help, and praying for those who would not pray for themselves.

In the second book of Samuel we have the record of a life singularly chequered and pregnant with solemn lessons. David's first ways were replete with true religion; God was in all his thoughts, and His glory was the end of all his ways. But a temptation too strong overtook a heart too susceptible, and David sinned, doubly sinned; and from that day to his death his heart was wrung with grief, and his house became the theatre of successive calamities. His infant dies. Absalom murders his brother. Ahithophel turns out a traitor. Absalom perishes in his sins. Nathan's prophecy passed into his history, and David's sin was so signally punished that it can surely never be quoted as a precedent, or his fall as an excuse, for others. It was then, as now, strictly and literally true, "The sinner's sin will find him out."

We shall find yet more awful evidence of this in our expositions of the Books of Kings.





